

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	243190
Site Address:	Land south of Bridge Farm, Reading Road, Wokingham, RG2 9HT
Expiry Date:	4 April 2025
Site Visit Date:	8 January 2025
Proposal: Application to vary condition 2 of Outline planning consent 223083 for the erection of up to 11 no. commercial units to provide 6,986sqm GIA commercial / employment development predominantly within Class B8 and/or Class E(g) uses with supporting facilities within Class E uses comprising ancillary offices, trade counters and food/drink facilities with highway works and strategic landscaping. Matters of Access, Siting and Scale to be considered only. Condition 2 refers to the approved details and the variation is to change the site layout.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Countryside
Ancient Woodlands
Contaminated Land Consultation
Green Routes and Riverside Paths Consultation Zone
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Local Wildlife Site
Minerals Site Consultation
Nuclear Consultation Zone – AWE 12km Zone
Public Open Space – Pound Copse
Tree Preservation Orders - TPO-0018-1968
Local Plan Update- Submitted Site 5AR024.
Public Right of Way - ARBO FP 22
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
Thames Basin Heath SPA Mitigation Zone – 5km
Zone Ordinary Watercourses Main Rivers

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 CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area 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 TB12 – Employment Skills Plan TB20 – Service Arrangements and Deliveries for Employment and Retail Use TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets TB26 – Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation DM3 - Protection of Habitats and Species DM9 - Protecting Health, Safety and Amenity DM10 - Flood Risk DM15 - Site History
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

PLANNING HISTORY		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
170433	Full application for the proposed extraction and processing of approximately 3.6 million tonnes of sand and gravel from a site of 190 ha, known as land, south west of bridge farm, together with erection of an aggregates processing plant, ready mix concrete plant and the provision of associated ancillary infrastructure and parking for HGV's and staff, with mixed restoration including importation of inert material to agriculture, lowland meadows, and wetlands. Proposed temporary diversion of public footpath 20 for the duration of operations.	Refused 23/08/2019
172209	Full application for the construction of a 2.3 km Arborfield Cross Relief Road (including shared use pathway) linking A327 Reading Road in the north and A327 Eversley Road in the south east. The proposal includes two new roundabout	Approved 23/01/2018

	junctions link to the existing road network along the A327, a new staggered priority junction at Swallowfield Road and a new shared-use (non-motorised user) bridge where Arborfield Footpath 17 intersects the proposed relief road.	
181802	Application to vary the following conditions of planning consent 172209 - 2. Approved details. The planning permission is for the construction of a 2.3 Arborfield Cross Relief Road. The proposed minor material amendment seeks to enlarge the red line boundary to allow for a) amended staggered priority junction design at Swallowfield Road, and b) greater visibility at the southern roundabout junction with A327 Eversley Road. Proposed minor material amendment to the archway profile of green bridge at Arborfield footpath 17.	Approved 03/09/2019
223083	Outline application for the erection of up to 11No commercial units to provide 6,986sqm GIA commercial / employment development predominantly within Class B8 and/or Class E(g) uses with supporting facilities within Class E uses comprising ancillary offices, trade counters and food/drink facilities with highway works and strategic landscaping. Matters of Access, Siting and Scale to be considered only.	Approved 02/02/2024

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No comments received
 WBC Drainage – No objections
 WBC Highways – No objections
 WBC Growth & Delivery (Planning Policy) – No comments received
 WBC Landscape and Trees – Objections (see main body of report)
 WBC Public Rights Of Way – No comments received
 WBC Emergency Planning – No comments received
 WBC Built Heritage Officer – No objections
 WBC CIL – No comments received
 WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments received
 WBC Ecology – No comments received

External

Woodland Trust – No comments received
 Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments received
 The Environment Agency – No comments/objections
 Forestry Commission – Guidance on Ancient Woodlands
 South East Water – No comments received
 Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue – No comment but provide advisory information

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council

Arborfield & Newland Parish Council (A&NPC) strongly objects to this variation/removal of condition consultation. For the same reasons and rationale applied in the Council's original objection to the original planning application 223083, the scale and location of these industrial units will irrevocably change a rural setting on a site next to an ancient woodland (recorded by the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association) and designated Local Wildlife Site (recorded by Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre). A&NPC does not believe any mitigations put forward by the applicant can offset the harms that would be caused to these irreplaceable environments. The core of the original objection to 223083 is replicated below as the objections still apply to the variation/removal of conditions consultation.

A&NPC brings to Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) attention that this proposal is in contravention of policies IRS1, IRS2, IRS3, TC3, AD3 and GA1 from the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan and policies CP1, CP3, CP6, CP7, CP9, CP10, CP11 and CP15 of WBC's core planning strategies. This reinforces A&NPC's strong objection to this variation and believes that WBC has no alternative but to reject this application for the reasons set out in this submission.

It is also noteworthy that from the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) table 4 exclusion categories 'Site within ancient woodland' that the NPPF advises that planning permission should not be granted normally for development which results in loss or deterioration of ancient woodland. It is clear that the siting of industrial units on the boundary of an ancient woodland would result in the deterioration of Pound Copse from light, noise and particulate pollution and have a detrimental effect to the wildlife that lives in and around the ancient woodland. The plans for the variations are not particularly clear and the Parish Council would like some assurances that the buffer zone of a minimum of 15m from the boundary of Pound Copse will be adhered to. This is a condition that UK government expects to be applied and concurs that if additional changes are likely to impact the ancient woodland, such as an increase in traffic/light/noise/pollution, then the buffer zone should be extended. The Council would be grateful if WBC officers could look into this and ensure that the variations/removal of conditions consultation factor in this requirement.

A&NPC would bring to the attention of WBC planning

	committee the nature of the updated landscape and visual impact assessment and how it has some strange aspects with which it looks over the development, from choosing roads that are screened across multiple fields and hedge rows to direct line of sight but no indication of what the actual development is going to look like in the way of scale and type of building present. The area proposed for development is currently classified as 'countryside' and no amount of additional planting around the site (which appears to be the conclusion of the assessment) will hide its very obvious industrial aspect from any visual aspects. The notion of additional landscape screening is there to hide development from view which tacitly admits the development is out of place in the location. The units would be in direct line of sight from the observer way by-pass and change a rural countryside aspect to that of an industrial estate no matter what steps are taken to colour the units. The site is currently a greenfield site and sits within the boundary of Arborfield village which is designated as 'limited development'. There is no demonstrable benefit from these variations to the local area. There are already a number of small and medium sized industrial estates in the local proximity and a number are advertising for businesses to use their industrial units demonstrating that the area doesn't need more industrial units as there is low take up of those already present with plenty of units vacant. A&NPC also notes that Bound Oak Industrial estate, which received planning permission for the redevelopment and expansion of an existing small industrial estate (which was supported by A&NPC) is now for sale with planning permission, but without the development having been undertaken. A&NPC has also raised no objections to the extensions proposed to Hogwood Industrial Estate as part of the Arborfield Garrison SDL development. With both of these developments within three miles of this proposed development, A&NPC believes there will be an over-supply of industrial units in the area if this proposal is given the go-ahead. With regard to Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan, this proposed development for an industrial estate on Observer Way contravenes the policies stated in the neighbourhood plan on a number of important points. Policy IRS1 – PRESERVATION OF SEPARATION OF SETTLEMENTS– section a – Preserve the character and appearance of the countryside – this development aims to build an industrial estate on designated countryside and from the Landscape and visual impact assessment
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	confirming that significant landscaping and tree planting would be required to hide the buildings from all directions of visual aspect would indicate that this development will not preserve the character or appearance of the countryside but irrevocably alter the countryside along Observer Way. Policy IRS2: RECOGNISE, RESPECT AND PRESERVE IDENTITY AND RURAL SETTING OF SETTLEMENTS, Development proposals must recognise, respect and preserve the identity and rural setting of settlements, with regard to: a) Scale and form of the development – this development is out of scale with all the building and residences in its locality, with it multiple large business units it is incongruous with the present farm buildings and residential properties in close proximity to the development site. As stated previously the need to plant significant numbers of trees to screen the development is tacit acknowledgement of its over scale design for the area and foreseen visual impact by virtue of its out of place scale. Following on from this, with reference to section 4.13 to 4.16 the development would restrict views of Pound Copse ancient woodland from the West and additional tree planting as suggested by the visual impact assessment would further hide the scale of the business units and any direct views across the fields of Pound Copse. POLICY IRS3: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND GREEN SPACES - 1. Development proposals should conserve and enhance the natural environment and green spaces of the area, this development will have an overall negative affect on the biodiversity locally; it will affect Pound Copse Ancient woodland with light, noise and particulate pollution from the large industrial vehicle movements. It will negatively impact the use of the ancient woodland for a number of species locally by adding a barrier to their entry into the ancient woodland and a creating barren tarmac area adjacent to the ancient woodland. The building of a sizeable industrial development next to Pound Copse will change the nature of the ancient woodland forever and cause a loss of amenity for the public who use these public open spaces by virtue of the scale and massing of the business units directly next to the ancient woodland, including noise and particulate pollution into Pound Copse. POLICY TC3: CONDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND
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	AGRICULTURE 1. New or existing businesses in the countryside are encouraged to re-use lawful buildings that are vacant – it should be noted that with reference to the policy of TC3 there are already a number of industrial units available in the locality such as Hogswood industrial estate and Nine Mile Ride industrial units that have numerous vacancies for small and medium sized businesses and A&NPC would encourage the full use of those facilities before further units are built anywhere locally. POLI CY AD3: HIGH QUALITY DEVELOPMENT WITH GENEROUS OPEN SPACE, PROPERLY LANDSCAPED – in stark contrast to this Neighbourhood Plan Policy this development is built of metal clad industrial units with no reference to local form or character of buildings. In addition, as stated numerous times in this objection the use of increased tree planting to screen the site is again acknowledgement of the impact on visual aspect of the site in both scale, massing and design of the units. POLICY GA1: MINIMISE ADDITIONAL TRAFFIC ON UNSUITABLE ROADS – the development would bring ever more heavy industrial vehicles to the roads across Arborfield Parish and show marked increases in traffic volumes locally for both persons working at the development and the frequent deliveries required to sustain an industrial estate and the businesses within. With regards to WBC Core Planning Strategies for development this development can be seen to contravene the following policies: CP1 – Sustainable development section – section 2 – minimise emissions of pollutants - in this case this development would be bring industrial traffic into the centre of Arborfield and additional vehicle use of local roads by cars, vans and large lorries. CP1 sustainable development – section 11 – demonstrate how they support opportunities for reducing the need to travel particularly in private cars – this development offers no alternatives to accessing the site but by car or industrial vehicle. This is an island site well away from any alternative travel arrangements. CP1 sustainable development – section 12 – There is little to no evidence of the inclusion of on-site renewables or any further environmental considerations for the site such as grey water recycling.
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	CP3 – General principles for development – are of an appropriate scale and mass without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces and their quality of life. This development is for large industrial units to be placed in direct line of sight from Pound Copse and Greensward Lane and would have an overbearing impact on the amenity of Pound Copse ancient woodland which abuts this development. The massing and scale of this development is such that the developer's own impact assessment concludes that additional screening is required and tacitly admits that the mass and scale is beyond what would reasonably be allowed to be developed at this location without much additional screening (hiding) of the development. CP6 - Managing Travel Demand – section e – this development offers no mitigation for the adverse effect of the vehicular traffic to and from site on local and strategic roads. This industrial site would facilitate large heavy goods vehicles and routes to and from the site would require use of traffic controlled local roads and very busy strategic roads and only add to the already congested nature of the local roads. CP7 – Biodiversity sections A B and C – the location of this development abutting an ancient woodland at Pound Copse and designated borough greenspace and would be detrimental to the biodiversity of Pound Copse through light, noise and particulate pollution from the industrial nature of the development. The variations offer no appropriate compensation measures to offset the harm it will inflict upon the local environment and especially the ancient woodland. This development does nothing to enhance local biodiversity and would on the balance of probability irrevocably harm the biodiversity locally. CP9 – Scale and location of development proposals – this development is located in Arborfield which is stated as an area of limited development in WBC core planning policies. CP10 – Improvements to Strategic Transport Network – in combination with the developments lack of approach to sustainable travel locally this development has made no attempt to offer improvements in local strategic travel network, a network that by its intended use will rely heavily upon for the movements of the heavy industrial vehicles that will be using the site. CP11 – Proposals outside development limits (including countryside) section 1 and 2 – this development would not contribute to local rural enterprises or to encourage rural
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	enterprises, there are already many local industrial estates with vacant plots not being used. The development by its location is an expansion of the original farm building and away from the original farm building that have been on site for some time. This development would act as a slow in-fill of the area along Observer Way and act to alter countryside aspect of the area to one of industrial development. CP15 – Employment Development – this development is in direct contravention to CP15 as it sits outside any of WBC Core employment areas. A&NPC previously submitted comments: COMMENTS: “The Parish Council objects to this proposal for the construction of a commercial development on the basis that is an unnecessary commercial development of a green field site that is situated within a Green Route Enhancement Area that would result in the erosion of the rural setting of the area for the following reasons: 1. Settlement Limits. By virtue of being located beyond settlement limits and failing to take into consideration the character of the countryside and landscape, the proposal would lead to an erosion and urbanisation of the countryside, failing to protect the quality of the environment. The proposal is therefore contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, CP11 of the Core Strategy, CC01, CC02 and CC03 of the MDD Local Plan and IRS1 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan. 2. Detrimental to the character of the area. The proposal would result in an incongruous and alien addition to the street scene and an erosion of the Borough’s green infrastructure, to the detriment of the character of the area. The proposal is therefore contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, CP1, CP3, CP9 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, CC01, CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, IRS2 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan. The council will continue to object to any proposed development along the boundaries of Observer Way.”
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	Two neighbour representations received outlining the following concerns: - Concerns about inclusion of food/drink facilities within the units. (<i>Officer comment: These facilities were already permitted under consent 223083</i>). - Concerns about number of policy breaches listed by

	Arborfield Parish Council. - Concerns regarding 15 metre Ancient Woodland Buffer - Current site is waterlogged, concerned about surface water drainage - Do not understand references to amenity land and what it means (<i>Officer comment: Amenity land is an area of open space that provides both visual and physical benefits for users of the industrial estate. For example, employees of the units may utilise the land during their breaks.</i>) - Concerns about impacts to protected species. - Concerns about hours of operation. - Query whether there are restrictions to ensure that very large lorries will not be allowed to use Greensward Lane. - Impacts on traffic congestion.
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APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site is located to the south of Bridge Farm Estate. The site is irregular in shape and measures approximately three hectares. To the north of the site lies Bridge Farm Estate which consists of several existing commercial buildings.

Primary access to the site is achieved by the access road linking an existing junction on Reading Road leading through the Bridge Farm Estates towards the northeast of the proposed development site.

The construction of the Arborfield Cross Relief Road (A327 Observer Way) runs parallel to the western boundary of the site and links to Reading Road.

The site is contained to the north and east by Pound Copse which is protected by a Tree Protection Order (TPO 18/1968), designated as ancient and semi-natural woodland and a Local Wildlife Site. This woodland is also designated as a public open space.

There is an existing PROW running alongside the eastern boundary of the site, this is identified as Footpath 22. This crosses observer way to the southwest.

Proposal Description:

This application seeks to vary condition 2 of outline consent 223083 for the erection of up to 11 no. commercial units to provide 6,986sqm GIA commercial / employment development predominantly within Class B8 and/or Class E(g) uses with supporting facilities within Class E uses comprising ancillary offices, trade counters and food/drink facilities with highway works and strategic landscaping. Matters of Access, Siting and Scale to be considered only.

Condition 2 relates to the approved details and the amendments sought are as follows:

- The proposed layout indicates a minor alteration to the siting of the buildings and the parking layout and a re-configuration of the internal floor space, which is now proposed across 7 units rather than 11 units as shown on the Illustrative Masterplan. The consented 6,986sqm GIA maximum is not altered by this change.
- Alterations to parking layout and indicative landscaping.
- Updates to the biodiversity metric figures, now indicating a net gain of 12.7% units on site.

It is important to note that the 223083 Outline consent only pertained to matters regarding Access, Siting and Scale.

Principle of Development:

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.

The principle of development was already found acceptable under previous planning consent 223083. Whilst the proposals involve a net decrease in the units proposed, the provision of B2/B8 floorspace proposed is not being altered. Therefore, nothing herein contained within the current application is deemed to affect this conclusion, therefore no objections are raised on the principle of development.

Notwithstanding the principle of development, this application is subject to further assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the character of the area, street scene, neighbouring amenity as well as compliance with other local and national planning policies. These are addressed in turn below.

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 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 the relevant policies, meaning weight attracted to these policies is limited.

Character of the Area:

Policy Context

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).

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 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;

Policy IRS1 of the The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan titled 'Preservation of separation of settlements' relates to development within countryside areas and seeks to preserve the character and appearance of the countryside.

Policy 1RS2 titled 'Recognise, Respect, and Preserve Identity and Rural Setting of Settlements' relates to new development being appropriately designed within a rural setting.

Policy IRS3 titled 'Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment and Green Spaces' relates to development proposals conserving and enhancing natural

environments and green spaces.

Policy TC3 titled 'Conditional Support for Business in the Countryside and Agriculture' relates to new businesses or existing businesses being encouraged to reuse buildings that are vacant, derelict or unviable subject to scale, neighbour amenity, parking arrangements and no excessive encroachment. In addition, the best and most versatile agricultural land should be protected.

Assessment

Siting:

The revised Illustrative Masterplan submitted indicates the site access, proposed development zones, areas reserved for buildings (Siting), maximum heights of building, structural landscaping zones, protected landscaping areas and landscape buffers.

The proposed units would still be primarily orientated east-west direction with the main vehicular access into the site via the existing junction with Reading Road and through the Bridge Farm industrial site. The siting of the units has not changed as a result of these proposals, rather the reduction in the number of units has seen an increase in the footprint of all the units proposed. The majority are negligible but notable changes have been made to Units 6 and 7, with Unit 6 protruding a further 7.6 metres southwards, and Unit 7 protruding a further 5.5 metres westwards.

In the 223083 Officer Report, the Council concluded that whilst travel by vehicle along Observer Way (speed limit 50mph) is not considered to be an activity for which views of a high amenity value would be expected, the development would undoubtedly be visible for a stretch, with or without structural landscaping. Recognising Observer Way is a main arterial route into and out of Arborfield Strategic Development Location, any part of the development visible for that short duration approaching or leaving the A327/Reading Road roundabout would be read in context to the status and nature of this road and is not considered to result in significant long-term harm from a visual amenity perspective.

The proposed alterations to the siting of the units (facilitated by the reduction in the number of them) is not considered to result in any further significant long-term harm from a visual amenity perspective as the alterations are modest and generally negligible in the full visual context of the industrial estate.

Scale:

The proposals still consist of predominantly 1.5 storey high commercial units orientated in an east-west direction. The proposed dimensions of the units previously consented compared to those currently proposed are below:

Unit no.	Gross Internal Area (m2)	Maximum Ridge Height (m)
A	1144	9.25
B	502	9
C	502	9
D	645	9
E	645	9
F	645	9
G	323	9
H	645	9
I	645	9
J	645	9
K	645	9

Application 223083 – Consented scales

Unit no.	Gross Internal Area (m2)	Maximum Ridge Height (m)
1	1226	9.25
2	548	9
3	538	9
4	882	9
5	1012	9
6	1542	9
7	1230	9

Application 243190 – Proposed scales

As can be seen from the tables above, the scales of the proposed units are notably larger than those previously consented, but this is a result of the concentration in the number of units proposed (net reduction in 4) and as outlined above, this increase in unit width is considered negligible in the visual context of the estate. Further to this, the heights of the units are not being altered from that previously permitted.

In the 223083 Officer Report, the Council concluded that the heights of the proposed commercial units would be reflective of their intended purposes and appropriate in relation to nearby existing commercial buildings when viewed for a short duration along Observer Way. They would be read in context with Bridge Farm as a continuation/ existing expansion of commercial uses and to a lesser extent the established linear development along Greenswards Lane.

The proposed alterations to the scale of the units, particularly due to the fact their heights are not changing, are not considered to have any further adverse visual impacts in terms of scale upon that consented by application 223083.

Appearance:

Whilst the detailed design of the proposed commercial units would form part of a

Reserved Matters application, no changes are proposed to the indicative appearances of the units consented under 223083, apart from the aforementioned increases in footprint to several units.

It is still considered that their appearance and materiality in principle is acceptable, with further details and material samples able to be secured by condition.

Heritage:

Policy TB24 relates to Designated Heritage Assets including Conservation Areas. The policy sets out the Council will conserve and seek the enhancement of designated heritage assets in the Borough, requiring a demonstration that proposals would at least conserve and where possible enhance a Conservation Area.

Bridge Farm sits at the northern end of Observer Way adjacent to the Reading Road. The historic farmhouse and associated farm building to west and south of it are seen on the 1873 OSMap when this was New Farm. These remnants of a traditional farmstead are non-designated heritage assets.

The WBC Built Heritage Officer has raised no objections to the variations proposed under this application. The proposed commercial units and the access (along with the new units) would continue to maintain a sufficient separation distance from the group of historic former farm buildings to have no discernible effect on them or their immediate setting

Neighbouring Amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy aims to protect neighbouring amenity.

The nearest residential properties are situated beyond Pound Copse (tree belt) along Greensward Lane, which is located northeast of the application site.

Due to the presence of Pound Copse as a buffer between the site and neighbouring properties at Greensward Lane and the intervening separation distance of 60 metres at the closest point between the buildings and the nearest dwelling), the proposal is still not considered to result in overlooking, overbearing or loss of light impacts.

Noise:

Policy CC06 and Appendix 1 of the MDD Local Plan requires that development protect noise sensitive receptors from noise impact.

There are both commercial and residential properties located within 60 metres of the proposed site. It was previously concluded that any expansion of business use is likely to lead to increased noise generation through additional traffic movements to and from the site and within the site itself.

If approved, this application will still be subject to a condition ensuring a Noise Assessment (BS4142 Standards) is to be submitted to ensure the proposal will protect residential occupiers from any noise impacts and include noise mitigation

measures. Existing background Noise from Observer way is also a consideration which must be taken into account in any assessment at reserved matter stage.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Parking:

Application 223083 consented 149 vehicle parking spaces for the proposed 11 units. Due to the reduction in the number of units, the number of parking spaces has been reduced to 128 spaces.

In table 2 on page 1 of the parking assessment note, it states that for B8 under the Borough standards, there would be a requirement for 95 spaces, this is incorrect as there would need to be 36 spaces. In the same document, a parking utilisation exercise has been carried out using the approved trip rates from 223083 which is welcome. However, this should have been carried out for the full site and not just for units 2 and 3.

That said, Highways have carried out the assessment for the 7 units and are content with the assessment. The parking is therefore close to the upper range when comparing B2 and B8 and is therefore acceptable (36 spaces to 144 spaces).

Each unit has their own disabled parking bay situated close to the access into each unit which is welcome.

Cycle and motor cycle parking will be provided in line with Borough standards and the details of those have been secured by condition.

Trip Rates:

WBC Highways have no further objections on the trip rates.

Walking and Cycling:

WBC Highways have no further objections on the provision of walking and cycling facilities to and within the site.

Site Roads:

WBC Highways have no further objections on the structure of the site roads.

Visibility Splays:

WBC Highways have no further objections on these grounds.

Swept Paths:

WBC Highways have no further objections on these grounds.

Framework Delivery and Servicing Plan:

Such a plan was conditioned by consent 223083 and will be re-imposed should this application be approved.

Framework Travel Plan:

Such a plan was conditioned by consent 223083 and will be re-imposed should this application be approved.

Framework Construction Method Statement:

Such a statement was conditioned by consent 223083 and will be re-imposed should this application be approved.

Flooding and Drainage:

The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and is defined as an area having a low probability of flooding. Both WBC Drainage and The Environment Agency have concluded that they have no objections to the proposed variations to consent 223083. The maintenance of the drainage strategy will still be secured by condition.

Thames Water:

Thames Water previously identified an inability of the existing foul water network infrastructure to accommodate the needs of the proposed development and recommended a condition to secure details on the foul water network is applied. This will continue to be imposed on this application should it be approved.

Landscape and Trees:

General Context:

Policy CC03 of the MDD Local aims to protect green infrastructure networks, retain existing trees and establish appropriate landscaping and Policy TB21 requires consideration of the landscape character.

The site is contained to the north and east by Pound Copse which is protected by a Tree Protection Order (TPO 18/1968), designated as ancient and semi-natural woodland and a Local Wildlife Site. This woodland is also designated as a public open space, which is accessed by a public footpath.

Public Right of Way ARBO 22 runs from Greensward Lane and along the western boundary of Pound Copse. A new bypass has recently been constructed (Observer Way) to the west of the site.

Arboricultural Matters:

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement and associated Tree Protection Plan was provided to support the initial outline application (223083). It identified the trees and woodland within and adjacent to the site including Pound

Copse.

A 15-metre buffer was maintained between the edge of the proposed development and woodland edge which is the minimum required within the Standing Advice for Ancient Woodland and no objection were raised in this regard. In the context of this current application, the 15-metre buffer is not affected by the proposed development and would continue to be maintained, to which no objections are raised.

Landscape Character:

Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA), dated November 2019, identifies a number of different landscape character areas (LCA's) across the Borough and provides key information regarding each of the LCA's. The site falls within two landscape character areas: C1 Arborfield River Terrace and J2 Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay.

Despite objections from the WBC Landscape and Trees Officer on the initial 223083 application and the fact the Officer Report concluded that the proposals would cause moderately adverse effects on the landscape character, it was considered on balance that the benefits of the scheme outweighed the areas of harm. It is also important to note that matters of landscaping are part of the Reserved Matters and are not a consideration at outline level.

Further to their objections to application 223083, WBC Landscape and Trees have raised further objections to this variation application, namely:

- Increase in the width of the units having a greater visual impact on the landscape.
- Minor encroachment of parking spaces into the landscaped areas.
- Bin and cycle stores are also now located in the landscaped spaces reducing areas for strategic landscaping.
- Reduction in landscaping provision in front of Unit 7.

Whilst the Landscape and Trees Officer's comments are acknowledged on the width of the units, the GIA of these units would remain commensurate with that previously approved and the visual impact resulting from the increase in their widths would not be substantial in the overall context of the estate.

Similarly, changes to the landscaping provision in front of Unit 7 is only a minor reduction and does not adversely affect the visual qualities of the indicative landscaping provision provided. Further to this, it has already been highlighted that detailed landscaping plans are reserved for the Reserved Matters stage and the indicative changes proposed are not considered adverse as to warrant a reason for refusal.

Overall, the proposed variations to 223083 are not considered to result in any additional adverse impacts on the surrounding landscape character. Provision of landscaping will be secured by condition and will comprise both the hard and soft landscaping for the site to embed its appearance into the surrounding rural landscape.

Ecology:

An Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) (ACD Environmental, Ref: ANG23850_EclA Rev A, September 2022) was submitted in association with application 223083.

Ancient Woodland:

The submitted Ecological Impact Assessment recognised that the adjacent Pound Copse local wildlife site is identified as ancient woodland according to Natural England's ancient woodland inventory. As mentioned above, the 15 metre buffer zone previously imposed is maintained for the current proposals and no further objections are raised on these grounds.

Protected Species and Species of Principal Importance:

The Council's Ecology Officer agreed for 223083 that the development proposal was unlikely to adversely affect Great Crested Newt, Common Toad, Hazel Dormouse, Otter, or Water Vole. This conclusion is not affected by the proposed variations.

Additionally, the risk to Badgers, Hedgehogs, Reptiles, and Nesting Birds during the construction phase can be adequately mitigated through the application of mitigation measures as outlined in the Ecological Impact Assessment. It was recommended the collation of mitigation measures relevant to the construction are integrated with the detailed construction plan. This should be included within the CEMP required for the ancient woodland mitigation which will still be secured by condition.

A potential for lighting to cause an impact on commuting and foraging bats has been identified. The Council's Ecology Officer agreed there is a risk in both the construction and operational phases. It is recognised that bat roosts are present in Pound Copse, and it is likely that foraging and commuting will occur across the site.

The risk in the construction phase can be adequately mitigated via measures secured within the previously imposed CEMP condition. The risk in the operational phase will need to be assessed and appropriate mitigation secured as the reserved matters detail is resolved.

Species Enhancements:

Section 7 of the Ecological Impact Assessment proposed several species-specific enhancements. The provision of bat boxes, bird boxes, refugia/hibernacula for amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates are welcomed to deliver high quality biodiversity enhancements to the scheme.

It was previously not agreed Schwegler 1FF bat boxes were the optimum choice of bat box for the development proposal and there are better boxes suited to integration with buildings. Additionally, the proposal for just two bat boxes was not considered proportionate to the scale of the development proposal and the Council's Ecology Officer recommended a minimum of eight are to be included within the final design in any future Reserved Matters application.

Further to this, it was not agreed three bird boxes are proportionate to the scale of the development proposal and it was (and still is) recommended a minimum of eight bird boxes are included within the final design in any future Reserved Matters application.

It is recognised that the full detail of species enhancements has not been brought forward at this stage as this is an outline application; the detail and implementation of the species enhancement is secured by condition.

Biodiversity Net Gain:

It is important to note that the original outline application was submitted prior to April 2024 and is therefore exempt from mandatory Biodiversity Net Gains.

Revisions to the Biodiversity Net Gains consented by application 223083 have been made under this application. In particular, the proposals now result in a gain of 12.7% habitat units and a 100% net gain in hedgerow units on site. No comments have been received from WBC Ecology, and it is therefore assumed they have no objections to these alterations.

To avoid a net loss for habitat biodiversity, it will be crucial for enhancements to occur in the ancient woodland buffer and within the woodland on-site. At this stage, it has not been established how these enhancements will be secured and maintained for a minimum period of 30 years. It is recommended the maintenance and management of the on-site enhancements under a Landscape and Environmental Management Plan (LEMP) is secured by condition.

Building Sustainability:

Core Strategy Policy CP1 requires development to contribute towards the goal of achieving zero carbon development by including on-site renewable energy features and minimising energy and water consumption.

This is amplified by MDDLDP policies CC04: Sustainable design and construction and CC05 Renewable energy and decentralised energy networks and the Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document (May 2010).

As the proposal is for commercial development of over 1,000sqm, Policy CC05 also advises that planning permission will only be granted for such proposals that deliver a minimum 10% reduction in carbon emissions through renewable energy or low carbon technology.

The Design and Access Statement for application 223083 stated that the development would be designed to achieve a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating, incorporating sustainability initiatives and reduce the buildings energy consumption. The proposed units will be designed to ensure they comply with the energy efficiency requirements including Part L of the building regulations. In addition, the proposal would also achieve current building construction standards with added sustainability measures through:

- Secure cycle provision to encourage sustainable modes of transport;
- Electric vehicle charging points
- Provision of more natural light into the units through Roof lights
- South facing solar panels
- Responsibly sourced materials
- Energy systems designed to minimize pollutant emissions

As the application is in outline, a detailed sustainability and energy efficiency report to demonstrate compliance with Policy CC05 will still be secured by condition.

Air Quality:

No further objections are raised by WBC Environmental Health on these grounds.

Land Contamination:

The site is listed as being potentially contaminated. A preliminary ground investigation survey will need to be provided to demonstrate suitability of the site for the proposed use which is secured by condition.

Waste Storage:

Policy CC04 of the MDD Local Plan requires adequate internal and external storage for the segregation of waste and recycling, as well as provision for green waste and composting and an appropriate area for ease of collection.

Full details of waste storage and collection have not been provided; this will be secured by condition.

Public Right of Way:

Footpath ARBO FP 22 runs from Greensward Lane and is close to the site boundary. Users of the footpath would only travel a short duration alongside the development and the Council's PROW Officer envisages there being no impact from a PROW perspective and recommends the footpath is kept clear in the event of an approval. This would require the footpath to be kept clear of the storage of building materials. This can be controlled by condition.

Employment Skills Plan:

Policy TB12 of the Wokingham Borough Council MDD, requires planning applications for all major development (both commercial and residential) in Wokingham Borough to submit an employment skills plan (ESP) with a supporting method statement.

This was incorporated into a s106 legal agreement as per the approval of consent 223083 and if this application is approved, a S106 Deed of Variation agreement will be entered into with the applicant to ensure the obligations of the original consent are linked to the new one.

Conclusion:

The proposal to vary the scheme is acceptable in principle and would accord with local plan policy and local and national guidance.

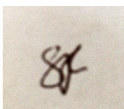
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL):

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:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approval – Subject to a S106 Deed of Variation Agreement
Date:	4 August 2025
Earliest date for decision:	3 February 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	5.8.25