

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	251381
Site Address:	Sonning Golf Club, Duffield Road, Reading, RG4 6GJ
Expiry Date:	11 August 2025
Site Visit Date:	04/07/2025
Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of a single storey building to form a Pro shop following demolition of the existing starters hut building.	

PLANNING POLICY	
National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability 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 CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB20 – Service Arrangements and Deliveries for Employment and Retail Use TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation DM3 - Protection of Habitats and Species DM5 - Protection of the Countryside DM9 - Protecting Health, Safety and Amenity DM10 - Flood Risk DM11 - Water Resources DM12 - Sustainable Transport Movements
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS4 – Development within or adjacent to minor settlements SS5 – Development in the countryside SS8 – Meeting our employment needs CE2 – Environmental standards for non-residential development CE4 – Supporting a circular economy

	CE6 – Reducing energy consumption in existing buildings 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 C6 – Technology and innovation in transport C7 – Digital infrastructure and communications technology C8 – Utilities ER1 – Core Employment Areas ER2 – Employment uses outside of Core Employment Areas ER3 – Supporting the rural economy ER4 – Employment and skills plans ER5 – The hierarchy of centres ER6 – Town, district and local centres and shopping parades ER7 – Strengthening the role of centres ER8 – Wokingham town centre ER9 – Woodley town centre and Lower Earley district centre H1 – Housing mix, density and standards H2 – Presumption against residential losses H3 – Affordable housing H4 – Exception sites H5 – Rural workers’ dwellings H6 – Self-build and custom build H7 – Specialist accommodation FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage NE2 – Biodiversity net gain DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity DH3 – Shopfronts DH4 – Advertisements and signage HC5 – Environmental protection
Other	National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document Sonning Parish Design Statement Sonning Design Appraisal

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Highways – No objection WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection WBC Ecology – No response received
External
N/A

REPRESENTATIONS	
Parish/Town Council	No comments received
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL
Site Description: The application site is located within the grounds of Sonning Golf Club, adjacent to the existing parking area and comprises of a small starters hut behind the electric pedestrian gate used to members to access the course. The site falls within the designated countryside, directly adjacent to the limited development limits of Sonning. Proposal Description: The proposal seeks full planning permission for the erection of a new Pro-Shop, replacing the exiting starters hut. With reference to the submitted planning statement, this application has been submitted to facilitate implementation of the wider reconfiguration of the club house and erection of 50 dwellings (approved in application 223458). This is because the consented 50 dwellings encapsulate land which forms the existing pro-shop. Thus, to facilitate implementation of application 223458, Sonning Golf Club have submitted this application for a new Pro Shop. 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. Section 38(6) of The Planning and compulsory purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Within the Wokingham Borough the adopted Development Plan comprises the Core Strategy (CS) and the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD), which are read alongside the NPPF and various Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD).

Policies CP1 and CP6 of the Core Strategy require that development be sustainable, by achieving zero carbon developments with a reduction in the need for travel and the promotion of sustainable transport. The site is unsustainably located relying on the use of the private motor vehicle.

Policy CP9 of the Core Strategy states that the scale of development must reflect the existing or proposed levels of facilities, services and accessibility in the area. The site is located in a countryside development location and so in terms of accessibility to facilities and services the proposal is unacceptable.

The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 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. CC01 echoes the National Planning Policy Framework, which has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan.

Emerging Local Plan Update:

A Revised Growth Strategy for the local plan was consulted on between 21 November 2021 and 24 January 2022, which proposed an alternative strategy for delivering growth in the borough due to the complexities regarding the deliverability of Grazeley garden town and following legislative changes to the emergency planning requirements around AWE Burghfield.

The site does not form a draft allocation for any form of development. Irrespective, considering the eLP's stage of preparation, it is not considered to hold substantive weight at this time. This is explored in greater detail below:

In considering the weight to be given to Wokingham Borough Council's emerging Local Plan Update (LPU), it is necessary to refer to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024), Paragraph 49 states that decision-makers may give weight to emerging policies according to:

- o The stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced its preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);
- o The extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given);
- o The degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan with the NPPF (the closer the policies are to the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).

Stage of Preparation

Regulation 19 version of the LPU was published and subject to consultation in September-November 2024. 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.

Unresolved Objections

The plan has been submitted with an accompanying Regulation 22 Consultation Statement. Appendix 15 to the Regulation 22 Consultation Statement sets out the main issues raised in representations to each policy and area of the LPU Proposed Submission Plan and the council's response. This can be used to understand the scale of objections and so inform the weight that might be applied. These vary across policies and thus as relevant, LPU policies and their relevant weight are explained throughout this report.

Consistency with the NPPF

Although Officers are confident that the emerging LPU, and its policies align with the NPPF, the degree of consistency has not yet been tested through examination and cannot be guaranteed. As per other cases, consistency with the NPPF is only one factor, and its relative importance depends on the extent to which the LPU impacts the planning balance in decision-making.

LPU Policy SS2 Spatial Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy is relevant to assessing the principle of development of this application, placing the application site outside of settlement limits. LPU Policy SS2 states that:

"The distribution of growth will be based on the following actions:

- a) Making the most efficient use of available and suitable previously developed land within defined settlements;*
- b) The sustainable extension of defined major and modest settlements;"*

The Council however, acknowledge that at this stage, there are unresolved objections on substantive grounds pursuant to LPU policy SS2 (detailed within the regulation 22 document) and as such limited weight against the scheme should be afforded given its conflict.

However, the proposal would meet the exceptions outlined within SS5 of the LPU which is tailored for development within the countryside.

Minerals and Waste Local Plan:

The Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (Joint Plan) was adopted by Wokingham Borough Council on 19 January 2023. The Joint Plan identifies site allocations and extensions to help provide a future supply of sand and gravel extraction.

However, despite these allocations, there remains a shortfall of supply during the plan period. The policy response to address the shortfall is the identification of a 'Minerals Safeguarding Area' (MSA), where Policy M2 of the plan applies, and also an 'Area of Search' where Policy M4 applies. This approach is to demonstrate the potential for, in effect, windfall provision within the Plan area.

Policy M2 aims to seek to protect mineral resources against unnecessary sterilisation by non-minerals development. The application covers an area approximately 0.2 ha in size and the supporting text of Policy 2 outlines a 3ha threshold. Policy M2 states *"A minimum plot size of 3 hectares will apply in the safeguarding process to avoid repeated consideration of prior extraction where this can be assumed to be uneconomic, due to the small size of the parcels of land involved."*

The site is located within the defined MSA for soft sand, sharp sand and gravel, however, given the 0.05HA developable area, this is highly unlikely to support a viable extraction operation and no objection is raised on this basis.

Countryside:

The application site is located outside of settlement limits, within the Countryside on the periphery of Sonning and therefore, is subject to the provisions of Core Strategy Policy CP11. CP11 being the relevant policy for countryside impact states that *"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."*

A proposal's ability to be in strict accordance with Core Strategy Policy CP11 is dependent on 7 criterion which define which types of development are acceptable within a sensitive and rural location. The 7 criterion 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

The proposal contributes to the activities within the wider Sonning Golf Club, which constitutes recreation in the countryside (albeit not publicly accessible).

2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and

The proposal would utilise the existing built footprint of the starters hut, and thus would not excessively encroach away from this.

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

Though no buildings are proposed to be converted, rather demolished and replaced, the new building would bring about environmental benefits in the form of improved appearance and more locationally appropriate design.

Criteria 4 – 7 are also not applicable to the proposed development.

To comply with the provisions of CP11, the aims of CP11(1) “and” CP11(2) “and” CP11(3) must be met. For the reasons clarified above, the amended proposal complies with CP11(1), (2) and (3) and thus the principle of development is acceptable.

Rural Enterprise:

Paragraph 88 of the NPPF 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;

It is acknowledged that there is an enterprise on site at current as well as an existing building. The proposal is of high-quality design, constitutes modest sustainable growth for Sonning Golf Club with respect to expanding its provision of services on site for Members and thus, in this respect, the proposal complies with paragraph 88 of the NPPF.

Paragraph 89 of the NPPF states: *“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.”*

It is noted that the golf club is likely to be utilised by those using private motor vehicles, however, as the pro-shop would be ancillary to this function, it is unlikely to trigger any significant increases in trip generation, nor have any unacceptable impacts on adjoining highways. It is noted that no sustainable transport improvements are sought for this proposal, however, it is reasonable to consider this acceptable given the modest scale of development. Notable enhancements would not be commensurate for the scale of development and thus are not sought. The proposal is compliant with paragraph 89 of the NPPF.

Character of the Area:

Core Strategy policy CP1 outlines that development should maintain and enhance the high quality of the environment.

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high-quality design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land uses and occupiers.

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

“b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside..”

The proposal would involve the demolition of the existing starters hut and replacement with a pro-shop which is modest in scale. This would facilitate the sale of golf paraphernalia for users of Sonning Golf Club.

The proposed building is circa 9 metres in width and circa 6 metres in depth, giving a modest footprint of c54m². This is larger than the existing starters hut which has a footprint of c14m², however, does not appear cramped on site, nor constitutes overdevelopment/ is a significantly urbanising figure.

The pro-shop is proposed to be clad in timber with a metal clad flat roof as indicated on the submitted design and access statement. The material palette is appropriate for the site's countryside location and provides softening form despite increases in scale.

As the site is contained within the grounds of Sonning Golf club and behind existing boundary treatment, despite high quality design/ material palette it would not be conspicuous from public views and thus would have no detrimental harm on the character and appearance of the area, compliant with CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy and the provisions of the Wokingham Borough Design Guide.

Neighbouring Amenity:

The proposal would have no significant or detrimental impacts on neighbouring amenity with respect to overlooking, overbearing, overshadowing, noise or odour given its proximity away from both existing and proposed residential dwellings. No objection is raised on this basis.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Considering the use of the pro-shop is largely ancillary to the Sonning Golf Club, and accessible by members only. This would not impact parking provision or highways access to the site, and thus there is no objection on these grounds by WBC Highways.

Flooding and Drainage:

The application site and access within is located within flood zone 1, and the proposal would increase the impermeable area on site by circa 40 square metres. This is a modest increase in footprint, and considering the site's location in an area at low risk of both surface and fluvial flooding, no objections are raised by the LLFA.

Landscape and Trees:

The proposal would not result in the loss of any landscape features, would not remove any trees nor would encroach/ be located within the root protection area of any trees. WBC Trees and Landscape raise no objections to the proposal on this basis.

Ecology:

The proposal is accompanied by a BNG metric and report, which display through the planting of 2no. field maple trees (*acer campestre*) a circa 39% biodiversity net gain will be achieved within the ownership of the applicant.

In absence of a response from WBC Ecology, the LPA have nothing to dispute this net gain or the baseline utilised and thus is deemed acceptable. With this in mind, the standard pre-commencement condition has been applied (in the form of an informative) to secure at least 10% via a habitat plan.

No protected species will be harmed by the proposed development, given its modest scale, location and nature. No objections are raised on this basis.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the proposed pro-shop would mark a modest and well designed feature for its intended location. It supports the function of Sonning Golf Club, does not afford greater trip generation than existing, is accompanied with environmental benefits and is compliant with the development plan and national policy.

The proposal is recommended for approval subject to conditions.

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 conditions
Date:	30 July 2025
Earliest date for decision:	7 July 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>BJC</i>
Date:	11.08.25

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Insert where relevant