

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	260049
Site Address:	Pound Lane Cottage, Pound Lane, Hurst, RG10 0RS
Expiry Date:	15 April 2026
Site Visit Date:	9 February 2026
Proposal: Full application for the proposed change of use of land to mixed use comprising of agriculture (keeping of goats) and storage of building materials together with the erection of 2no. storage buildings.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

Countryside (CP11)
Bat Roost Suitability Habitat
Red Risk Zone for Great Crested Newts
Flood Zone 1

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development 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 CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside SS16 – Safeguarded routes CE1 – Design principles for efficient buildings CE2 – Environmental standards for non-residential development

(LPU)	C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C3 – Active travel C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging ER2 – Employment uses outside of Core Employment Areas ER3 – Supporting the rural economy FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage FD3 – River corridors and watercourses NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity HC5 – Environmental protection HC7 – Light pollution HC8 – Noise pollution HC10 – Odor, fumes and dust
Other	National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document A Design for Hurst

PLANNING HISTORY

There is no relevant planning history for the site.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No comments received
WBC Drainage – No objections subject to condition(s)
WBC Highways – No objections subject to condition(s)
WBC Landscape and Trees – No objections subject to condition(s)
WBC Ecology Newts – No objections subject to condition(s)
WBC Ecology – No comments received

External

None consulted

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	St Nicholas Hurst Parish Council has no adverse comments pertaining to application 260049.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received

Neighbours	No comments received
------------	----------------------

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site is a 2,330sqm (approx.) parcel of land sited towards the southern end of a single-track private road accessed from Pound Lane to the North.

The site has no planning history and according to available aerial imagery had never been developed, with the exception of two smaller buildings that have now since been demolished. Historic aerals appear to conclude that the land was used for agricultural purposes as tractor tracks are visible on historic aerals from 2004.

The site's immediate context is predominantly rural consisting of open fields to the west, a farmyard to the immediate north and a scatter of large, detached houses to the east/north-east. There is also a dog kennel at the end of the southern access track.

The site is located within the designated Countryside and located wholly within the within the landscape character area (LCA) I1 known as 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland'.

Proposal Description:

This application seeks advice for the proposed mix use of the site for two different uses, consisting of the following:

- The northern section of the site is proposed to be used for storage purposes, specifically a contractor's storage area. The use would be served by a gravel driveway to the east, a detached storage shed and approximately 350sqm of hardstanding to the west which would be used to host external storage.
- The southern section of the site would be used for agricultural purposes, specifically the keeping of goats. A single feed store shed is proposed to the south-western corner of the site.

Additional boundary treatments include post and rail fencing along the site's eastern frontage. The contractor's store would include a mixed infill timber gate, whilst the agricultural land would include a standard post and rail gate.

Principle of Development:

Policy Context:

Local Plan Update:

The Council is currently progressing their Local Plan Update (LPU). The Proposed Submission Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination by an independent Planning Inspector on Friday 28 February 2025. Two independent Inspectors were appointed, with Part 1 examination hearings held in November 2025. The Inspectors have now written to confirm the examination can progress to Part 2 hearings, which are due to commence in March 2026.

As a result of the above, the weight applied to the LPU policies is currently 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 (MDDLDP) 2014:

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

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:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, beautiful new buildings;
- b) 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:

Keeping of Goats (Agriculture):

The use of the western portion of the site for agricultural purposes (keeping of goats) is rurally appropriate and no objections are raised to this in principle. The storage/feed building would be sited on the footprint of the previously demolished building. It would be modest in scale/form and therefore is not considered to result in excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the larger farm buildings adjacent at Oakley Farm despite the distance from these buildings.

The proposal for the keeping of goat and erection of associated feed building complies with CP11(1) and (2). CP11(3) is not applicable to new buildings.

Contractor's Store:

Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy deals with proposals outside of development limits (including countryside) and consequently is the locational policy most relevant to the proposed development. This policy sets out that in order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside development limits will not normally be permitted. There are seven exceptions listed under CP11, with exceptions 4-7 relating to residential extensions, affordable housing, replacement dwellings, and essential community facilities. These are not relevant to the development.

In order to meet exceptions 1-3 listed under Policy CP11, developments must:

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

In terms of criteria 1, relating to the proposal supporting a diverse and sustainable rural enterprises, the proposal does not relate to a rural enterprise or promotes recreation in, or enjoyment of, the countryside. A building contractor yard is a use/business which can operate in the countryside but is not dependent on the countryside to operate. Whilst it is noted that a business such as this will require sufficient space to store stock, which

the countryside can provide, it is not dependent on, nor reasonably associated with a countryside location.

The convenience of its location for the applicant (who lives directly opposite the site) to use the site to store equipment and materials associated with his existing business is acknowledged, but this is not considered sufficient justification for a change of use of the site to a contractors yard.

Overall, it has not been demonstrated that the intended use would support a rural enterprise as required by criteria 1.

Criteria 2 states that development should not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion away from the original buildings. The storage buildings proposed would replace a previous structure in a very similar location. However, the proposal must be assessed against the status quo and as this building no longer exists, it cannot be taken into consideration. Notwithstanding this, the previous structure was related to the agricultural use of land not a contractors yard. The erection of large areas of hardstanding, domestic style vehicle gates and access road on this undeveloped field and the amount of storage and vehicle movements associated with the intended use is considered significant in scale and nature in this countryside context. There are no buildings on the land and it is enclosed from other built form by high boundary hedges. The proposals would unacceptably encroach away from the original buildings and therefore fail to comply with criteria 2.

With regards to criteria 3, the proposal relates to the erection of a new building therefore (3) is not applicable as it relates to conversions or replacement buildings.

As outlined above, criteria 1-3 need to all be complied with in order to achieve compliance with CP11 and be considered acceptable in principle. As a result of the aforementioned conflicts, this is not possible.

Overall, the proposal does not constitute a rural enterprise or one that promotes enjoyment or recreation in the countryside and results in excessive expansion from the building in connection with the commercial use. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy.

Policy CP15 relates to employment development for business, industry and warehousing and indicates that it will be permitted in Core Employment Area and within the development limits. This business use in a Countryside location is contrary to the premise of this policy which seeks to direct commercial development to more sustainable areas where there will be limited harm to the character and appearance of the area.

Turning to national policy, part a) of paragraph 88 supports the growth and expansion of all types of businesses in rural areas but of principal importance is that this growth and expansion must be sustainable. It is acknowledged that paragraph 89 of the NPPF does state that 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. However, in these circumstances it is 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 proposed contractors yard involves the change of use of land for a new business in the countryside, it does not involve the expansion of an existing business use in this rural location. For the reasons raised above, the proposal is not considered to be sensitive to its surroundings and causes harm to the environment.

Character of the Area:

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
- b) term but over the lifetime of the development:
- c) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- d) 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).

Policy RD8 of the Wokingham Borough Design Guide (2012) states that *"Areas of hard-standing should be kept to a minimum and should be appropriate to a rural setting, for instance gravel or strips of brick paving, rather than large areas of concrete block paving. Surfaces must allow surface water to percolate into the ground."*

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 wholly within the landscape character area (LCA) I1 known as 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland'.

The valuable landscape characteristics of the LCA include;

- **Characteristic mature in-field and roadside oaks** in the open arable fields which provide a sense of place.
- **Wooded skyline** which provides a backdrop to the surrounding areas.
- **Strong rural character** of the rolling agricultural landscape with its subtle wooded ridges, large woodlands and sparse settlement which create a strong sense of place.
- **Remote quality** due to the scarcity of settlement and relative inaccessibility by footpath which results in a sense of tranquillity despite proximity to urban centres and motorways.
- **Distant framed views** over the surrounding landscape, including to Wokingham town and wooded horizons outside the borough which provides a sense of place and orientation.

The Landscape Strategy is to conserve and enhance the existing rural character. The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the characteristic wooded ridges and woodland, including ancient woodland. In particular, there are opportunities to restore coppice management and reinstate and repair key hedgerows with hedgerow standards.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern through controlling development. This is supported by 'A Design Guide For Hurst' (2005) which states, within one of the objectives, that *"It is important that the rural aspects of the area*

are preserved” (page 7).

Assessment:

‘Character’ encompasses a multitude of facets considered to be and not just physical/ visual character, but characteristics such as tranquillity. Part of an area’s character can be traits that are not tangible. Character goes beyond appearance and the two are distinct. The NPPF in paragraph 187 states that planning decisions should ‘contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by...recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside...’

CP1 and CP3 establish a requirement for a high standard of design which respects its context and contributes positively to the quality of the environment.

Keeping of Goats (Agriculture):

This use raises no character concerns as agricultural uses are appropriate in the Countryside. The feed store building is modest in scale and replicates the footprint of the original potting shed, causing no further harm to the prevailing character of the area.

The gate for the agricultural use would be a standard 5-bar wooden gate that would be in-keeping with the existing boundary treatment and would have an acceptable visual impact.

Builders Contractors Storage:

The proposals involve the retention/creation of large areas of hardstanding to facilitate the storage proposed. The site lacks prominent visibility when viewed from the street (Pound Lane). This is owing to the site being sited towards the end of a private single-track road and enclosed by the farmyard to the immediate north as opposed to being in a prominent and open position within the countryside landscape. Although views of the site from public vantage points are extremely limited, the builders yard is nevertheless sizeable area of storage in the open countryside.

Therefore, whilst the proposed hardstanding would alter the physical appearance of the site compared to its former undeveloped grassed state, the principal consideration is not the engineered surface in isolation but the nature and intensity of the use it facilitates. The proposed builders’ storage use would introduce a commercial activity and associated storage paraphernalia into the open countryside, which would be at odds with its rural character. Even though views of the site from public vantage points are limited, the scale and utilitarian nature of the storage use would nevertheless result in an erosion of countryside character, arising from the presence of an open storage yard rather than from the hardstanding surface per se.

The storage building proposed is of similar scale to the feed/storage building associated with the keeping of Goats it is for an entirely different use and given its size, the majority of storage is likely to take place outside the building. The cumulative impact of both the hardstanding and the new building would undoubtedly cause harm to the site’s intrinsic rural character and verdant rural surroundings arising from the introduction of a commercial storage use rather than the physical scale of the structures alone.

The highly domestic appearance of the entrance gates is an additional element that detracts from the rural character of the site and its surroundings. The form, detailing and domestic nature of the gates are more typically associated with residential uses rather than agricultural or countryside uses, and as such appear incongruous within this rural setting. Their introduction serves to further formalise and domesticate the site frontage, reinforcing the impression of an enclosed, managed commercial compound rather than land that forms part of the open countryside.

Turning away from the physical and visual impact of the development, the proposal seeks to introduce commercial storage to this rural area. Aside from the proposal not being accepted in principle as discussed earlier in the report, the open, active use and presence and movements of non-agricultural vehicles, equipment and materials contributes further to the diminished rural quality of the wider surrounding area and would disturb the tranquillity of the surrounding Countryside particularly the rural private road Landscaping provision on the eastern 'frontage' and western rear boundaries of the site are noted but cannot be relied on in perpetuity to mitigate the impact of a development that is harmful to the surrounding environment.

In addition, the provision of three on-site parking spaces indicates that up to three vehicles and/or employees could be present at the site at any one time, reinforcing the commercial and active nature of the use and its incompatibility with the quiet rural character of the locality.

With regards to the development aims of the LCA, the development would directly conflict with the development aim to conserve the sparse settlement pattern, and the main aim to conserve and enhance the rural character, by reason of the introduction of a commercial storage use to the Countryside and the associated impacts raised above.

Overall, the proposal is considered to have a materially harmful effect the area's character through disturbing the countryside's tranquillity. The increase in development and commercial activity in this sensitive rural setting is also directly contrary to the development aim of the LCA which is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern. The proposal would therefore conflict with the NPPF as it fails to enhance the beauty of the countryside, as well as policy CP3 of the Core Strategy and TB21 of the MDD.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Overlooking, Loss of Light:

Due to the nature of the uses proposed, scale of the buildings and the distances from neighbouring properties and other land uses, there are no concerns on these grounds.

Noise:

Whilst there are no noise concerns related to the agricultural use proposed, the vehicular movements and loading/unloading activities associated with the storage use would undoubtedly result in some notable noise emissions, albeit limited and irregular in nature.

The closest residential property would be Oakley Farmhouse, located approximately 53

metres north of the storage area proposed. Such a distance implies that the irregular noise emissions from the storage use are unlikely to cause any material noise impacts on the amenities of the property's occupiers. A condition will also be imposed limited the operating hours of the use to standard daytime hours, further avoiding any harmful noise impacts from the development.

Overall, the development raises no concerns on noise grounds.

No external lighting is proposed, and a condition should prevent external lighting being installed without permission from the local planning authority to prevent harm to neighbour amenity as well as the countryside location.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

General sustainability and Highway safety:

Policies CP1, CP6, CP9 and CP11 of the Core Strategy permit development where it is based on sustainable credentials in terms of access to local facilities and services and the promotion of sustainable transport. This is expanded in paragraph 4.57 in the Core Strategy, which aims to prevent the proliferation of development in areas away from existing development limits as they are not generally well located for facilities and services and would lead to the increase in use of the private car. It is also reiterated in the NPPF.

The creation of commercial use site outside of Core Employment Areas and defined settlement limits does not fit with the spatial objectives of the Development Plan. The site is within the countryside and poorly located with regard to sustainable transport options.

The site is located within the Countryside in an unsustainable location; the only viable form of access to the site by employees or customers of the storage business would be via private motor vehicles, as there is limited to no local pedestrian or cycle infrastructure (lack of footpaths, high road speeds, lack of street lighting) along Pound Lane or the wider locale, nor is there any nearby bus stops or train stations. This is contrary to CP6 and

It is acknowledged that the applicant lives nearby the site, however the proposed use is not for a personal permission. Planning permission runs with the land and it is rarely appropriate to provide otherwise. There may be exceptional occasions where development that would not normally be permitted may be justified on planning grounds because of who would benefit from the permission. There are no such circumstances in this proposal.

Furthermore, the limited vehicle movements associated with the two uses proposed are unlikely to have any notable impacts on the wider highway network. The application states that it is anticipated that a staff member would attend the premises no more than two to four times per week for the purpose of collecting or dropping off materials. There will be days, and potentially entire weeks, when no visits occur. To ensure that the level

of activity remains as described and does not intensify to the detriment of the character of the area or highway safety, this matter can be appropriately controlled by condition. A condition restricting the number, type and purpose of vehicular movements would provide the Local Planning Authority with ongoing control and ensure that the use operates within clearly defined parameters.

Despite the site being obviously located outside of any settlement limits and in the countryside, no analysis of the proximity of the development to local facilities and services or the submission of a travel plan or has been provided with the submission. Although para 84 of the NPPF indicates that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, however the proposal would result in an unsustainable pattern of development by reasons of siting as well as the poor sustainable transport options in the locality and the countryside location. The proposal is contrary to CP1, CP3 and CP6 of the Core Strategy, CC01 and CC02 of the MDD Local Plan and the NPPF which seek to reduce the need to travel, particularly by private car, and resist development outside defined settlement limits.

Access and Manoeuvring:

The site retains the existing access for the contractor area via the private shared drive section of Pound Lane. New gated accesses are proposed for each respective use.

The applicant has submitted swept paths for both accesses proposed, which WBC Highways consider acceptable based on the fact the largest vehicle intended to be used would be a 7.5 tonne delivery vehicle.

Parking:

Three parking spaces are proposed for the commercial storage use. The applicant has stated that this number is sufficient because it is anticipated that a staff member would attend the premises no more than two to four times per week for the purpose of collecting or dropping off materials. There will be days, and potentially entire weeks, when no visits occur. WBC Highways are satisfied with this justification.

Overall, subject to conditions, WBC Highways raise no objections to the proposed development despite the unsustainable location.

Flooding and Drainage:

The application site is located within Flood Zone 1, is not at risk of surface water flooding and has a negligible risk of groundwater flooding.

The applicant has submitted a drainage strategy (Lanmor Consulting, January 2026, ref: 262073/DS/IR/KL/01 Rev.A) for the application site. WBC Drainage have no objections to its contents, but have requested the following to be clarified via conditions:

- Confirmation of how roof drainage from the timber sheds will be managed, with details demonstrating consistency with the confirmed ground conditions and high groundwater levels on site.

- Confirmation of subbase thickness consistently across all drawings and documents with the hydraulic model updated to reflect the as-designed storage volume.
- A pollution risk and water quality assessment, particularly surrounding the fouling associated with the keeping of goats.
- The submission of a post-completion report for the drainage strategy prior to the development's first use.

The LPA however consider these requests unnecessary to make the scheme acceptable; the site is not located in a high risk area for groundwater as explained above, with the feed building for the goats being located on an area of existing hardstanding. The pollution assessment is also unnecessary, on the basis that the keeping of goats (agriculture) does not require planning permission, only the associated.

Landscape and Trees:

This application is supported by Arboricultural Impact and Method Statements, plus an associated Tree Protection Plan (Duckworths Arboriculture Ltd, December 2025).

The builders storageto the north is characterised by a mix of Italian Poplar and Scots Pine, to the NW part of the boundary is a group of 5m high Blackthorn. Further along the western boundary is a Blackthorn hedge of 2m. There is no vegetation to the southern or eastern boundary. By enhancing existing boundary hedgerows with a variety of native hedge species, as well as native hedge planting to the internal boundaries, there is a good opportunity to comply with the landscape guidelines and Policies CC03 and TB21.

The Arboricultural information submitted would ensure the existing vegetation is submitted, with WBC Landscape and Trees raising no concerns with the protection and construction methods proposed.

Overall, WBC Landscape and Trees have no objection to the proposals in terms of adverse impact on features of the landscape. Provision is made in the AMS to ameliorate the soil beneath the key tree feature along the northern boundary and provide a separation area between the working area and the area directly beneath the trees.

Ecology:

Bats:

The site is located within a Bat Roost Suitability Habitat. Whilst the operational development is unlikely to have any adverse impacts on this protected species, any lighting associated with the uses would need to be sensitively designed to avoid any adverse overspill onto nearby habitats, such as the tree line on the northern boundary.

As such, a condition will be imposed limiting the use of lighting on-site without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority.

Great Crested Newts:

The application site is located within a Red Risk Zone for Great Crested Newts. Impact risk zones have been derived through advanced modelling to create a species

distribution map which predicts likely presence. In the red impact zone, there is highly suitable habitat and a high likelihood of great crested newt presence.

There are 3 ponds within 250m of the development proposal. The closest of these is 50m west of the site boundary.

The applicant has provided an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA): 'Poundlane Cottage, Pound Lane, Hurst Reading, RG10 0RS', Darwin Ecology Ltd., December 2025. The assessment identified hedgerows and bramble scrub that would provide foraging, resting and commuting opportunities for amphibians, as well as multiple areas of refuge and hibernacula in the form of fallen deadwood, timber and rubble piles, and a derelict building. The assessment concludes:

"Due to this high level of connectivity, and the presence of some suitable opportunities for amphibians on site, it is anticipated that individual amphibians mayPublic: Information that can be seen and used by everyone inside and outside the Council. access and utilise the site on occasion. Due to the sparse nature of the ruderal vegetation, it is considered likely that amphibian presence on site is predominantly restricted to the boundary habitats."

Section 6.38. of the EclA contains an avoidance and mitigation strategy that should be used to inform all works on site. These measures suitably mitigate against potential impacts, employing a precautionary approach and reducing the suitability of the site for GCN. As such, it is recommended that the measures within section 6.38. of the report as secured by condition.

An informative will also be placed on the decision notice reminded the applicant that under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), it is an offence to (amongst other things): deliberately capture, disturb, injure or kill great crested newts; damage or destroy a breeding or resting place; deliberately obstruct access to a resting or sheltering place. Planning approval for a development does not provide a defence against prosecution under these acts. Should great crested newts be found at any stages of the development works, then all works should cease, and Natural England should be contacted for advice.

Biodiversity Net Gain:

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

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

"The biodiversity gain condition is a pre-commencement condition: once planning

permission has been granted, a Biodiversity Gain Plan must be submitted and approved by the planning authority before commencement of the development.

WBC Ecology have reviewed the submitted metric and BNG assessment. They have concluded that based on an assessment of pre-application site visit, Streetview and aerial photos, there has been impact to on-site habitats (or 'degradation') prior to the submission of the planning application which has affected pre-development biodiversity value.

Paragraph 6 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 makes provision relating to unauthorised degradation takes place:

"Where unauthorised degradation of the onsite habitat has taken place on the land between 30 January 2020 and the date of relevant date, the biodiversity pre-development value of the onsite habitat should be calculated as the biodiversity value of the habitat on the date immediately before the carrying out of these degradation activities. The relevant date should therefore be set as a date immediately before these activities. Unauthorised degradation of onsite habitat is any degradation which is not in accordance with a previous planning permission.

*If there has been degradation and there is insufficient evidence about the biodiversity value of the onsite habitat immediately before the degradation, the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat must be taken to be the **highest biodiversity value of the habitat which is reasonably supported by any available evidence relating to it.** This requirement must be applied to the calculation of pre-development biodiversity value in the metric tool."*

Where degradation activities have taken place, the applicant must provide:

- a statement setting out that these degradation activities have been carried out;
- confirmation of the date immediately before these activities were carried out;
- the pre-development biodiversity value of the site on this date;
- the completed metric calculation tool showing the calculations, and
- any available supporting evidence of this.

No degradation statement has been submitted with the application, nor does the submitted metric take into account the site clearance. As such, WBC Ecology disagree with the baseline habitats provided within the metric, and consider that greater enhancements will be required to achieve the mandatory 10% net gain when addressing the degradation in recent years.

Notwithstanding the above, the concerns raised by WBC Ecology do not lead to a reason to refuse; achieving a 10% net gain is not out of the realms of possibility providing the degradation is addressed when calculating the baselines. This could therefore reasonably be secured post-permission by the Biodiversity Gain Plan condition, automatically imposed in the event of an approval.

Conclusion:

It has been identified that the development has harmful impacts; firstly, the storage use proposed is contrary to the development plan as a whole and is unacceptable in principle. It has a detrimental impact on the character of the area due to the encroachment away from original buildings and results in harm to the Countryside and the surrounding landscape character. The site is also in an unsustainable location, resulting in an over-reliance on private motor cars to access the site. As such, there are clear negative impacts of the scheme.

The economic benefits of such a use are recognised, however the overall weight is limited due to the scale of the proposal. Weighing against the proposal is the inconsistent nature of the use in its countryside location and environmental harm identified above.

Overall, this application is recommended for refusal.

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 reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. 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:	Refusal
Date:	15 April 2026
Earliest date for decision:	20 February 2026

Recommendation agreed by:	
----------------------------------	---

(Authorised Officer)	
Date:	15 April 2026

