

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	260498
Site Address:	Wilderness Lodge, Wilderness Road, Earley, Wokingham, RG6 5RG
Expiry Date:	8 May 2026
Site Visit Date:	5 th May 2026
Proposal: Full application for the formation of a pond with associated hard landscaping, ground reprofiling and landscaping works (retrospective).	

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 CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals
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 CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS9 – Whiteknights Campus 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 NE6 – Valued landscapes NE7 – Sites of Urban Landscape Value HC3 – Local Green Space HC5 – Environmental protection HC6 – Air pollution and air quality
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
N/A	N/A	N/A

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Drainage- No objection subject to condition(s)
Tree and Landscape- No comments received
WBC Digital Solutions Scanning- No comments received
WBC Built Heritage Officer- No comments received
WBC CIL- No comments received
WBC Ecology Newts- Objection
WBC Ecology- No comments received

External

Berkshire Gardens Trust- No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Earley Town Council raises no objection
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	2 representations as follows; - <i>There appears to be no details submitted for the main timber teaching shelter</i> - <i>No details for the compostable WC</i>

APPRAISAL

Site Description: This application site relates to Reading University, Whiteknights Campus. The application site is located along Wilderness Road, and the proposed pond is to be situated within the Harris Walled Garden.

Proposal: This application seeks permission for the proposed formation of a pond, with associated hard landscaping, ground reprofiling and landscaping works (retrospective).

Planning History: This application site (Whiteknights Campus) has had extensive planning permission; however, Wilderness Lodge has no planning history itself apart from pre- application advice 252327 submitted in October 2025.

The pre- application response states that some of the works may be permitted using Permitted Development rights which include

- Part 2, Class A- The erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure:
This right permits the erection or construction of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure provided that; the height of any such structure would not exceed 2 meters above ground level.

- Part 7, Class M – The erection, extension or alteration of a school, college, university, prison or hospital building:
This right permits the erection of new buildings or structures for university use provided that, among other criteria, the cumulative footprint of the structure(s) would not exceed 250 square metres; the development(s) would be more than 5 metres from the boundary of the university premises; the height of the structure(s) would be no greater than 5 metres if the development is within 10 metres of the university boundary, or 6 metres in height in all other cases.
- Part 7, Class N – Hard surfaces for schools, college, universities, or hospitals:
While this right permits the provision of a permeable hard surface within the curtilage of a university where it is to be used for the purposes of the university, the cumulative ground area covered by any hard surface within the curtilage of the site must not exceed 50 square metres.

The applicant and LPA are in agreement that the extent of hardstanding proposed would not comply with Part 7, Class N and therefore would require planning permission.

The summary of the pre-application advice stated that further information is required to demonstrate that the land falls within the University's Curtilage to understand whether certain areas of the works could be carried out under Permitted Development.

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 site is located within settlement limits and as such the development should be acceptable providing that it complies with the principles stated in the Core Strategy. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials 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.

Character of the Area: Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that developments are of appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to other adjoining land users. R1 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that development contribute positively towards and be compatible with the historic or underlying character and quality of the local area.

The site lies adjacent to Wilderness Road to the south and to the north is the Whiteknights Park Local Wildlife Site and the main Reading University Whiteknights Campus. The site is situated with the Major Development Location of Earley.

The NPPF outlines in section 15 "Conserving and enhancing the natural environment, Paragraph 193d *that development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and*

around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate”.

The proposal would involve the creation of a new pond particularly for a new “living laboratory” serving as an important resource for several academic departments within Reading University, which include, the School’s of Biological Sciences, Archaeology, Geography, Environmental Science, Agriculture, Policy and Development. This development is central to the University’s teaching strategy, bridging the gap between theoretical and practical hands-on experience. The pond itself is set to be 1 meter deep and surrounded by hard and soft landscaping.

The site also includes other amenities such as the erection of a timber teaching shelter, an accessible WC, and associated landscaping works, including the introduction of allotment-style planters, fruit trees, and wetland planting.

The proposed layout incorporates functional educational spaces integrated with ecological zones and biodiversity enhancement. The teaching shelter and WC are located centrally, surrounded by thematic planting and a boardwalk at water level. The site also includes pathways made from self-binding gravel, which connect the functional areas and ecological zones.

Given the size of the Whiteknights Campus the 0.3-hectare site that will be used to accommodate the pond and amenities, it is small in scale and will enhance the area that was originally used as an ornamental walled garden with flower beds, fruit and vegetable plots, and polytunnels. As the site has previously been neglected, the proposal will enhance the character of the area and therefore comply with CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy.

Neighbouring Amenity: The proposed site is situated within the Whiteknights Campus. The proposal is well distanced from any residential amenity, and set to be screened with boundary treatments, as such, there are no detrimental impacts on neighbouring amenity.

Highway Access and Parking Provision: The proposal would have no significant or detrimental impact on highways, access or parking provision.

Flooding and Drainage: The site is situated within Flood Zone 1. Given the nature of the development, the proposal has been accompanied with a Flooding and Drainage Statement which has been reviewed by the Council’s Flooding and Drainage Officer. *The proposed use is classified as Water Compatible Development and the LLFA raises no objection on fluvial, groundwater or reservoir flood risk grounds. The surface water flood risk shown on the EA long-term flood risk map is noted; the applicant’s explanation that this reflects an off-site flow path from Whiteknights Lake which would be intercepted by the perimeter brick walls is considered reasonable and accepted.*

The ground investigation is considered adequate for a site of this scale. Saturated infiltration rates are poor but remain viable for infiltration-based SuDS, and a factor of safety of 1.5 has been applied throughout, which is accepted. The drainage strategy follows the SuDS hierarchy appropriately, directing runoff from paths and the canopy

to the pond upper plateaus and geotextile-lined infiltration trenches. Climate change allowances of 20% and 40% have been applied consistently with NPPF guidance. The LLFA is satisfied that surface water generated by the proposed development will be adequately managed within the site without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

Groundwater monitoring to January 2026 records a shallowest level of 1.05m bgl, marginally above the proposed pond base of 1.01m bgl. The lower pond section is to be fully lined with a butyl geomembrane anchored into position. The LLFA is satisfied that the lined pond design adequately addresses the relationship between the pond base and groundwater, and that the risk of groundwater flooding at the surface remains low based on the evidence submitted.

Landscape and Trees: The site is surrounded by Veteran Trees as identified by the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association. Subject to the Arboricultural Assessment, Four C grade Bay trees have been removed from the site.

The tree survey identified 10 tree records in total, including 6 B-grade trees and 4 C-grade Bay trees which were removed prior.

In summary, the Arboricultural impact of the proposed scheme is minor as no trees are to be removed and minimal pruning is required to enable construction works to be completed.

Policy CC03d) of the Local Plan states that development should aid to protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features. As the proposed development is to enhance the landscape and there are no incursions into the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of the surveyed trees, the proposal complies with this policy. Therefore, no objection from the Council's Tree and Landscape Officer have been raised.

Ecology: The site is situated in an area suited for Ecological Roosting Features. The site lies within the red impact zone for Great Crested Newts. There are 5 ponds within 500m of the proposed development which are suitable features for Great Crested Newts.

Nature Space has reviewed this application and are not satisfied with the conclusion of the applicants Ecological Report which states;

"The brick wall surrounding the site acts as a significant dispersal barrier to newts accessing the site. Therefore, it is considered unlikely that great crested newts would have been present within the interior walled area of the garden prior to vegetation clearance works taking place"

While the wall surrounding the site is likely to act as a barrier to Great Crested Newt dispersal, this is not exhaustive. Access points are present in this wall on the western (from Harris Garden) and eastern (from Storage Yard) elevations. Gaps capable of permitting GCN are visible under the main entrance of the western wall. Any further gaps in the wall at ground level or holes that have been dug under the wall would also enable GCN movement on and off the site.

Habitat within the site is highly suitable for Great Crested Newt with overgrown scrub and ruderal vegetation dominating the flower beds. An old timber shed, log piles and brick piles have also created potential hibernacula. Moreover, the presence of GCN within the pond on site cannot be rule out in the absence of further surveys.

Furthermore, whilst the site is within an area suitable for bat roosts, a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was conducted and found that *“whilst having moderate to low potential to roost in the garden’s walls, particularly in gaps and crevices present in the northern and western walls. Two potential bat roosting features associated with the northern wall (north elevation) had been blocked during wall repair work. To mitigate the loss of potential roosting features, it is recommended that at least eight bat boxes be installed on the existing brick wall, which will further enhance the site for local bat populations”*.

Heritage: The site of the Harris Walled Garden is located within the Whiteknights Park Local Historic Park and Garden, a non-designated area of historical and social significance. The proposed development seeks to enhance the site for educational purposes while preserving the character of the existing garden. The historic brick walls surrounding the site, which define its character, will be retained and any necessary repairs or repointing will use traditional materials such as lime mortar, as recommended by the Built Heritage Officer.

At the time of the Pre- application, the Council’s Heritage Officer stated that *“Whist there is no objection necessarily with the plans to dramatically alter the layout of the space within the walled garden, given that it is understood the historic boundary walling is being retained and unchanged. Such that the area of historic parkland the site lies within would not be harmed.*

With respect to any necessary repairs or repointing of this walling it is advocated should be undertaken using matching materials (bricks and mortar) with repointing works done using a traditional lime mortar mix.

Given the above, there is no objection from the Council’s Heritage Officer.

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.

Conclusion: For all the above, the proposal is acceptable, and the application is recommended for approval.
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RECOMMENDATION	
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Conditions agreed:	Not required
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Recommendation:	Approve
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Date:	5 May 2026
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Earliest date for decision:	31 March 2026
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Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
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MC

Date:	07.05.2026
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