

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	251233
Site Address:	Warren Crest Farm, Wick Hill Lane, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3PY
Expiry Date:	27 May 2026
Site Visit Date:	17 July 2025
Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of 3no. dwellings following demolition of existing dwelling, outbuilding and agricultural barns.	

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 CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability 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 CP17 – Housing Delivery
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 TB05 – Housing Mix TB07 – Internal Space Standards TB21 – Landscape Character
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation DM15 - Site History
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU) (N.B. the	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside SS10 – Meeting our housing needs CE1 – Design principles for efficient buildings CE3 – Environmental standards for residential development C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility

LPU is deemed to hold overall limited weight at this time).	C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging H1 – Housing mix, density and standards FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE3 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design NE6 – Valued landscapes DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
250063	Application for a certificate of lawfulness for the proposed erection of an outbuilding.	Approved – 26/02/2025
241564	Householder application for proposed single storey side extension and single storey front infill extension, following demolition of the existing conservatory, the part raising of the roof to create first floor habitable accommodation, the conversion of the existing garage to create habitable accommodation and the part conversion of the detached store building to create a workshop and garage plus fenestration changes.	Conditionally Approved – 25/09/2024
233112	Prior approval submission for the proposed change of use and associated building operations to re-use existing agricultural buildings as 3no. dwellings and 1no. garage.	Prior Approval Granted – 09/07/2024
05206	Detached farmhouse and garaging	Conditionally Approved – 28/10/1976

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Highways: Request further information before determination
WBC Landscape and Trees: No objection subject to conditions

WBC Public Rights Of Way: No comments received
WBC CIL: Advice regarding CIL matters
WBC Ecology Newts: No objection
WBC Ecology: No objection subject to conditions and S106 legal obligation
External
Fisher German Surveyors: Advice regarding Ecolumn pipeline
Natural England: No comments received
Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust: No comments received
Binfield Badger Group: No objection subject to mitigations during construction

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Finchampstead Parish Council raised no objection.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	1 comment received in support of the application.

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The site comprises part of a large agricultural holding located to the south of Wick Hill Lane, Finchampstead. The site falls outside of settlement limits within open countryside with agricultural fields to the south/south-east, woodland to the east and the settlement of Finchampstead North to the north/west.

The site's built form, comprising the existing 1970s dwelling with its associated outbuildings and a cluster of agricultural buildings, is concentrated towards the northern boundary of the agricultural holding. The site is accessed via Wick Hill Lane, a restricted byway adjacent to the site's northern boundary, a public footpath runs adjacent to the site's north-western boundary.

The immediate street scene is characterised by detached dwellings within large residential plots, with its character becoming more verdant and open as you traverse from the north-east where the lane adjoins the neighbouring settlement. The existing dwelling is set well back from the byway, with the agricultural buildings appearing more prominent.

Proposal:

This application proposes the erection of a replacement dwelling and 2no. separate dwellings following the demolition of the existing dwellinghouse, including the detached garage and outbuilding, and 2no. agricultural buildings.

This proposal is effectively a redesign for the redevelopment of the site following three recent separate consents: application ref 241564 for extensions and alterations to the existing dwellinghouse; application ref 233112 for the conversion of the existing agricultural buildings to 3no. dwellings and 1no. garage under Permitted Development rights; and application ref 250063 for a proposed outbuilding incidental to the use of the existing dwelling under Permitted Development rights.

The proposed replacement dwelling would have a total footprint of approximately 610m² and offer three floors of habitable accommodation including 5 bedrooms, as well as an attached double car port and an indoor swimming pool. The proposal would sit towards the southern boundaries of the existing plot, in a similar position to the existing dwelling albeit with a larger footprint, with a barn style design.

The proposed two separate dwellings would comprise a 1 x 1 bed residential flat, which would occupy the first floor of a 'coach house' style building with garage space underneath, and a 1 x 2 bed dwelling. The proposed dwellings would be sited to the north-east of the existing dwelling, outside of its residential curtilage, in a similar position to the existing agricultural buildings to be replaced. The proposal would have a total footprint of approximately 160m² with a similar barn style design.

Principle of Development:

Planning law states that applications for planning permission must have regard to Section 36 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the Local Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this case, the development plans consist of the Core Strategy 2010 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014. The requirements of Section 36(6) are also contained within Policy CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) must also be considered as it constitutes guidance which the Local Planning Authority must pay regard to. The NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making, however, is a material consideration in any subsequent determination.

1) The proposed erection of two separate dwellings

Development Plan

Core Strategy 2010

The site is located outside of and unconnected to any Settlement Boundary and is within a part of the borough which is designated as countryside. The spatial strategy for the borough is contained within the Core Strategy. Policy CP9 'Scale and location of development proposals' of the Core Strategy relates to the scale and location of development proposals and seeks to focus development proposals within those identified major or modest development locations.

As the site is located outside of settlement limits within designated countryside, Core Strategy Policy CP11 'Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)' is applicable in this instance. Policy CP11 refers to protecting the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. The supporting text also identifies that preventing the proliferation of development in areas away from existing development limits is important, as they are not generally well located for the facilities and services.

Policy CP11 states that proposals outside of development limits will not normally be

permitted except where certain criteria are met. The relevant criteria are highlighted:

- 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.

The proposal comprises the erection of two market dwellings following the demolition of 2no. agricultural buildings. While the proposal would partly comply with exceptions 2) and 3) through replacing the existing buildings on site and not significantly increasing their respective footprints, the change of use of land from agricultural to residential does not accord with any of the above criteria. The proposal would therefore not accord with any exception criteria and is contrary to the development plan in this respect.

Despite the policy conflict, turning to the overall aim of Policy CP11, this is to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. While located outside of settlement limits, it is acknowledged that the site is located to the end of an existing linear form of development within this section of Wick Hill Lane, adjacent to the settlement boundary of Finchampstead North, and the proposal would comprise the redevelopment of existing buildings within the countryside.

The proposal would therefore likely not compromise the separate identity of the settlement of Finchampstead North. On this basis, the overarching aim of the policy is not compromised; however, there remains an in-principle policy conflict which will be considered within the planning balance. Maintaining the quality of the environment would ultimately depend on how the proposed development would respond to the character of the area and its impact on the wider landscape. This is discussed in more detail in the 'Landscape and Character of the Area' section of this report.

Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014

Policy CC02 of the MDD Local Plan states that development at the edge of settlements can be acceptable where it is demonstrated that it is within development

limits and respects the transition between the built-up area and the open countryside, taking into account the character of the adjacent countryside and landscape.

In this case, the site is not located within settlement limits and therefore Policy CC02 does not apply.

Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan 2023

The site is not located in an area where geological data suggests there are potential sand and gravel reserves. Subsequently the policies of the Joint Minerals and Waste Plan do not apply to this proposal.

Emerging Local Plan Update

The Local Plan Update (LPU), the plan which will supersede the adopted Core Strategy and MDD Local Plans, is at Regulation 22 stage as it has been submitted for examination. As per paragraph 49 of the NPPF:

Local planning authorities may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to:

- a) the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced its preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);*
- b) 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); and*
- c) the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to this Framework (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).*

As a whole, the LPU is still given limited weight despite its advanced stage of preparation. This is owing to unresolved objections to a great number of the policies contained within it.

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan

The Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan (FNP) was adopted in September 2023 and covers the area of Finchampstead parish. Policy AHD1 only allows development outside of development locations where it is supported by national and Borough planning policies. Supporting text at paragraph 5.5 in the FNP states that development outside development limits will be supported when considered against the criteria set by Core Strategy policy CP11, or successor. As such, given the proposal fails to comply with policy CP11, the proposal is also contrary to policy ADH1 given the alignment between the two policies.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF is a material consideration in the decision-making process. The NPPF outlines the Government's planning policy on a national level and highlights sustainable development as the centre of the decision-making process incorporating economic, social and environmental objectives. These three objectives seek to

balance growth and local community needs against the protection of the natural, built and historic environment.

Paragraph 12 of the NPPF also states that the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision-making.

Housing Land Supply

To achieve sustainable development, the NPPF (December 2024) at paragraph 78 requires LPAs to identify a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than 5 years old. The latest published Five-Year Housing Land Supply Statement (at 31st March 2025) shows the Council is currently only able to demonstrate 2.5 years' worth of deliverable sites. Subsequently, those policies relating specifically to housing development identified above are currently considered to be out of date. However, this does not mean that they have no weight.

Paragraph 11(d) states that where policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, permission should be granted unless:

- i. the application of policies in the Framework that protect assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
- ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

Firstly, in considering i), the proposed site is not located within any protected areas or assets of particular importance (as defined in footnote 7). Therefore, the proposal must be considered under ii) to determine whether there are any adverse impacts generated by the proposed development that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. This is referred to as the 'tilted balance', as harms and benefits are not weighed equally, but tilted according to paragraph 11(d)(ii).

An important underlying reason in the context of Wokingham Borough is the historic oversupply of housing against both the requirement set out in the Core Strategy local plan and the scale of local housing need as calculated by the previous standard method which remains a key contributing factor to the current lack of the required deliverable housing land supply, and this must be considered in the planning balance.

Having established the tilted balance is engaged, paragraph 11(d)(ii) requires the proposal to be considered against the policies of the NPPF taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination. These key policies, as outlined within footnote

9, will be referred to throughout this report where relevant, with the balance required by paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF given in the 'Planning Balance' section.

NPPF taken as a whole

Paragraph 11d(ii) requires the proposal to be considered against the policies of the NPPF taken as a whole and the three pillars of sustainable development.

Paragraphs 83-84 of the NPPF are most relevant to the consideration of this proposal for new dwellings in the countryside. Paragraph 83 states that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the viability of rural communities, while paragraph 84 outlines how decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside.

Firstly, it is necessary to establish whether the proposal qualifies to be considered under Paragraph 84 as 'isolated homes in the countryside'. The NPPF does not define what is classed as 'isolated', as such, consideration can be given to both an analysis of the location, any conclusions reached in assessing previous planning history, any accompanying information submitted by the Applicant and case law.

In the case of *Braintree DC v SSCLG* [2018] Civ 610 ('the Braintree Case') the term 'isolated' was to be given its original definition; that being, *'far away from other places, buildings and people'*.

The proposal would be sited within a cluster of existing buildings and other structures associated with the operations of Warren Crest Farm. It would also be sited largely on existing hardstanding and replace 2no. existing agricultural buildings. Moreover, the proposed dwellings would be in close proximity to the existing dwelling and neighbouring properties fronting Wick Hill Lane.

Furthermore, the existing use and condition of the site must be taken into account. The NPPF defines previously developed land as *"land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed) and any associated fixed surface infrastructure"*. Despite its location outside settlement limits, the existing buildings and the curtilage of the developed part of the wider site would meet this definition.

As a result of the above, such development in this countryside location is not considered to result in 'isolated' dwellings within its spatial context. Further consideration of the visual and spatial impact of the proposal is set out in the 'Landscape and Character of the Area' section of this report.

Locational Sustainability

Paragraph 110 of the NPPF states that the planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of the objectives to deliver well-designed, sustainable and popular places of paragraph 109. This includes identifying and pursuing opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use, and considering the environmental impacts of traffic. It acknowledges that opportunities to maximise

sustainable transport options will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in decision-making.

Paragraph 115 of the NPPF states that LPAs should ensure that sustainable transport modes are prioritised, safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users, the design of transport elements including streets and parking areas reflects current national guidance, and any significant impact from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree.

These policies are reflected in the local development plan. Policies CP1, CP4, 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.

While located outside of settlement limits, the site is within a ten minute walk of local services within Finchampstead Crossroads Local Centre, approximately 0.3m from the site. As such, future residents would have access to services and facilities including a primary school, shops, community facilities and bus services on foot or by bicycle meaning they will not be solely reliant on car travel.

However, it is noted that local bus services are limited and the likely mode of transport would be via the private motor vehicle. Moreover, pedestrian and cycle access along Wick Hill Lane would be impractical and undesirable to a degree due to the lack of footpaths/cycle lanes and street lighting. Therefore, there would likely be a high degree of reliance on private vehicle usage.

However, given the existing Prior Approval consent for the conversion of the agricultural buildings to 3no. residential dwellings the Council's Highways Officer has raised no objection on sustainability grounds.

Fall-back Position

The site benefits from a Prior Approval permission (ref 233112) which is valid until 9 July 2027. This consent allows for the change of use of the 2no. agricultural buildings, to be replaced under this proposal, to 3no. residential dwellings (1 x 1 bed and 2 x 3 bed) and an ancillary garage under Schedule 2 (Part 3) (Class Q) of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).

It has been stated within the submitted planning statement that the Prior Approval permission has established the principle of residential development and constitutes a fall-back position for this proposal. The possibility of the fall-back position being implemented must be taken into account as a material consideration, however the development which could be carried out under Permitted Development does not automatically outweigh any identified harm proposed under this application.

The relevant case law is R (on the application of Zurich Assurance Ltd (t/a Threadneedle Property Investments) v North Lincolnshire Council 2012. This offers an explanation as to when an LPA can take a fall-back position into account when

deciding if to grant planning permission. An existing planning permission and Permitted Development rights are both capable of being possible fall-back options that an applicant may ask an authority to take into account when deciding whether or not to grant planning permission. The question which arises however is whether or not the fall-back position is genuine and therefore qualifies as a material consideration for determining the current application. Whereas what amounts to a material consideration is a matter of law, the weight to be given to it is a matter of planning judgment and the weight to be given to the fall-back position is a matter for the decision maker.

In this case, it has already been demonstrated in the submission of application ref 233112 that the existing buildings are used as part of an established agricultural unit. This was agreed by the Council as part of its assessment of the Prior Approval application. The conversion of the existing agricultural buildings into 3no. residential dwellings is a valid permission and the application demonstrated that works can be carried out without major disruption to the existing buildings. There is sufficient time left for its completion without rendering the Prior Approval unlawful.

The previous approval was subject to 6no. conditions, two of which require the submission of further details to the Council prior to the commencement of the development. While these conditions have not yet been discharged, there is sufficient time for these to be complied with and allow the development to proceed before the expiry date (09/07/2027).

A full comparison of the current proposal and the scheme approved under the Prior Approval application will be assessed in the 'Landscape and Character of the Area' section of this report. However, an important contrast between the two schemes is that the current proposal would introduce 2no. separate residential dwellings compared to 3no. separate residential dwellings which is a more intensive use of the land compared to neighbouring properties. The submitted drawings demonstrate that the proposed dwellings and amenity space would not considerably expand beyond the footprint of the existing buildings to be demolished and would not expand onto the open agricultural fields to the south.

While the current proposal would constitute the change of use of a larger area of land to residential compared to the Prior Approval scheme, this would not represent significant loss of countryside due to the existing footprint and relationship of the buildings with the agricultural fields to the south, as discussed above, and would appear to be respective of the neighbouring residential plots within the immediate area. Moreover, the Prior Approval scheme did not explicitly include any amenity area for the three units, and it is reasonable to expect that some is provided. Therefore, the proposal would not introduce any harm in this respect.

Overall, the applicant has clearly demonstrated their intention to either re-use or replace the existing agricultural buildings to create separate dwellings, and there is very likely sufficient time to complete the Prior Approval scheme within the required timeframe if, for whatever reason, the current proposal was not proceeded with. It is therefore considered that the Prior Approval consent forms a viable and valid fallback position for the redevelopment of the site, and weight can be given to it in the planning balance.

Summary

The site is located within the countryside and does not satisfy any of the exceptions set out in policy CP11 concerning development outside of settlement limits, and therefore would be contrary in principle to the adopted development plan. However, as mentioned above, the Local Planning Authority is unable to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply and therefore the weight afforded to policy CP11 is reduced insofar as it relates to the supply of housing, although its countryside protection objectives remain relevant.

There is also a viable fall-back position for the residential development of the site which would constitute a more intensive use and denser development compared to the current proposal. A full comparison of the two schemes will be assessed in the 'Landscape and Character of the Area' section of this response letter. An overall assessment of the proposal in light of the fall-back position, and the balance required by paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF will be given in the 'Planning Balance and Conclusion' section of this report.

2) The proposed erection of a replacement dwellinghouse

Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy does not normally permit development outside of settlement limits except where certain exception criteria are met. In the case of a replacement dwelling, a proposal must bring about environmental improvements or not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original dwelling. This is consistent with policy AHD1 of the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan.

With exception of some minor alterations, the site's planning history indicates that the original dwelling has not been extended since it was constructed (planning consent ref 05206 dated 18/10/1976). It also appears that the existing detached garage was built in connection with the dwelling. It is not clear when the separate outbuilding was constructed.

A comparison of illustrations showing the volume of the existing built form across the wider site, the potential volume of extant schemes, and the current proposal has been illustrated within the submitted Design & Access Statement. However, a breakdown of existing and proposed volume or footprint calculations have not been submitted in support of the application.

Nonetheless, the proposed replacement dwelling would mark a very significant increase in external built form in comparison to the original dwelling. The submitted drawings for planning consent ref 241564 indicates that the original dwelling (including the garage) has a total footprint of approximately 205sqm. The proposed dwelling would have a total external footprint of approximately 610sqm, representing an increase of 198% over and above the size of the original dwelling.

Additionally, the proposal would have a total ridge height of approximately 10.3m, 1.3m taller than the ridgeline of the existing dwelling. Therefore, when considering the increase in height and footprint, the proposal would represent a clear significant

increase in the scale, form and footprint of the original dwelling.

In terms of environmental improvements, the application is supported by a Sustainability Statement which provides clear evidence on the scheme's sustainability aims particularly in respect of water and energy efficiency. The statement argues that a replacement dwelling is environmentally preferable to an extension or retrofit of the existing dwelling due to factors including no cavity walls and high air leakage, persistent thermal bridging and the inefficiency of installing low-carbon technologies such as Air Source Heat Pumps.

A "fabric first" approach exceeding all Building Regulations U-values is taken with this proposal, including a highly insulated and airtight building envelope with high performance glazing, with the aim to achieve an EPC rating A in comparison to the existing rating D. An Air Source Heat Pump alongside water efficiency measures and a SuDS drainage system are also proposed.

While the exact details on how the sustainability goals will be achieved are not known at this stage, the submitted information provides broad detail on how the replacement dwelling could bring about material environmental improvement compared with the existing dwelling and comply in principle with policy CP11 and align with the environmental objectives of sustainable development set out in paragraphs 8, 131, 159 and 160 of the NPPF.

Nonetheless, any sustainability benefits associated with the proposal, such as improved energy and water efficiency for the dwellinghouse, are likely to take a number of years to offset the embodied carbon associated with demolition and construction so their benefits are tempered to a degree. While not determinative in isolation, these sustainability benefits are a positive of the scheme and attract weight in the planning balance to a degree.

Fall-back position

The site benefits from an extant planning permission for a proposed single storey side extension, single storey front infill extension, part raising of the roof and other alterations to the existing dwelling (consent ref 241564 dated 25 September 2024). The Lawful Development Certificate (LDC) application ref 250063 dated 26/02/2025 also confirms that an incidental outbuilding can be constructed within the curtilage of the existing dwelling under Permitted Development rights. The submitted Planning Statement states that both permissions, combined with environmental improvements arising from the demolition of buildings across the whole site, constitutes a fall-back position for this proposal.

While the current proposal is not wholly comparable to the extant permissions, it is clear that the applicant's intention is to improve the layout of the existing vacant dwelling and create additional habitable accommodation to make an enhanced living space. Indeed, the PD outbuilding comprises an indoor swimming pool, gym and other incidental amenities which are contained within the 'west wing' of the current proposal. Due to the current scheme resulting in a broadly similar outcome in terms of layout and use, more weight can be given to the extant permissions relating to the existing dwelling as a material consideration than is normally accepted to a degree.

When considering potential fall-back positions, a key consideration is whether any relevant alternative development on the site would be **more harmful** than the current proposal. The applicant's submission focuses on the reduced footprint of the current proposal compared to what could be built and retained on the site under the extant permissions, and subsequently reducing the spread of built form within the site by erecting a consolidated replacement single dwelling. This is illustrated by a series of drawings, although a breakdown of footprint calculations which could support this argument has not been submitted.

The extant householder permission would constitute a relatively modest increase in size over and above the size of the original dwelling, with an increase in footprint of approximately 60sqm. However, the incidental outbuilding proposed under the approved LDC application would have a considerably larger footprint of approximately 156sqm. Following a review of the site's planning history and the submitted plans, the following table provides a breakdown of the footprint calculations which have informed the assessment of this application (all measurements are approximate):

Original Dwelling (as it stands today including the detached garage)	205 square metres
Existing Residential Outbuildings	126 square metres
Existing Agricultural Buildings	332 square metres
Total Existing Footprint (across the whole site)	663 square metres
Additional proposed footprint under the extant permissions	216 square metres
Proposed Replacement Dwelling	610 square metres
Proposed Separate Dwellings	163 square metres
Total footprint of the proposed scheme	773 square metres
Total footprint of the extant permissions (across the whole site)	879 square metres

A full comparison of the proposed development to the claimed fallback position will be carried out in the 'Landscape and Character of the Area' section of the report below. However, it is acknowledged that the current proposal, while approximately 100sqm larger than the existing footprint across the site, would be approximately 106 square metres smaller in footprint than the extant permissions which could be implemented (including the retention and change of use of the existing agricultural buildings to 3no. separate dwellings).

Summary

Policy CP11 states that a proposal for a replacement dwelling must bring about environmental improvements or not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original dwelling to be considered acceptable in principle. In this case, it is acknowledged that the proposal would bring about environmental improvements in the long-term. Additionally, while the significant increase in size over and above the original dwelling would result in environmental harm in principle, this must be assessed in the context of the legitimate fall-back position for the re-development of the site and the current proposal would result in a more consolidated

form of development.

Subject to the proposed development having an acceptable impact on the character of the area and the wider landscape, the proposed replacement dwelling can be considered to comply with policy CP11 and policy AHD1 of the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan in principle.

Landscape and Character of the Area:

MDD Local Plan Policy TB21 requires consideration of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment. Proposals must retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape. The site is located within Area N2 'Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland' of the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBCLA) (2019) which is a high quality landscape within high sensitivity and a low capacity for change. The landscape strategy includes to conserve and enhance the quiet rural character and dark skies, and the aim of development is to conserve the coherent pattern of settlement and avoid the spread of urban built form including roads into the area.

The site is also located within the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape, identified in the Valued Landscapes Topic Paper submitted as part of the evidence informing the Local Plan Update submission. Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that decisions should protect and enhance valued landscapes.

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy requires developments to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale, mass, layout, built form, height and character of the area and must be of high-quality design. 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.

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF, a key policy referred to in paragraph 11(d), requires that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping, and are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting. Paragraph 139, another key policy referred to in paragraph 11(d), states that development that is not well designed should be refused.

The site is located within designated countryside but is occupied by built form associated with the existing residential and agricultural uses. Open fields are located to the immediate south while parcels of woodland lie to the north, east and west. There are single and groups of trees within the site which contribute to the wooded character of the area. While existing trees offer a degree of screening, the site is highly visible from the public footpath adjacent to the north-western boundary and the adjoining byway to the north (Wick Hill Lane). There is no consistent building line within the immediate street scene and neighbouring dwellings vary considerably in terms of their scale, bulk and material palettes.

A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Portus + Whitton, May 2025) has been

submitted in support of the application which concludes that the proposal would be only marginally more visible than existing or consented development, and it would represent a visual improvement over the extant permission, particularly through the replacement of modern, non-vernacular agricultural buildings with smaller, purpose-designed dwellings. It is deemed that the overall effect on landscape character would be neutral to slight, with opportunities for enhancement through new planting and habitat creation.

The Council's Landscape Architect has reviewed the LVIA and subsequently raised no objection to the application, agreeing with the conclusion that landscape effects would be slight and can be adequately mitigated through retaining and enhancing all existing landscape features of value and additional native and tree planting. These mitigations would soften the overall appearance of the replacement dwelling, with additional planting particularly on the northern boundaries screening the proposed buildings from the adjacent Public Right of Way. Ornamental garden areas (including lawns) are also restricted to small areas directly adjacent to the dwellings, with the remainder of the site comprised of formal landscaping incorporating the retained trees and a new wildflower meadow.

Subject to a final landscape scheme and management details being agreed by condition, the landscape proposals will provide an appropriate setting to the new development and subsequently minimise the resulting harm to the wider landscape. The proposal therefore complies with MDD Local Plan policy TB21 and paragraph 187 of the NPPF.

Replacement Dwelling

In terms of its size and scale, the proposed replacement dwelling would mark a significant increase in the size and scale of built form within the existing residential plot. However, this would not be uncharacteristic in itself with several nearby dwellings comprising footprints of over 600sqm. This section of Wick Hill Lane comprises a loose pattern of detached dwellings in large plots and while the size and form of neighbouring dwelling vary, the proposal would sit comfortably at the upper end of the average scale of development.

The replacement dwelling would remain well back from the site's frontage and all boundaries, with additional planting which will screen the development over time as discussed above. The incorporation of wings and roof accommodation rather than prominent vertical massing creates a fairly low profile which breaks up the visual massing of the scheme, while its total height would be in keeping with neighbouring examples.

In comparison to the extant permissions, the proposal would remove the outbuildings to the front of the existing dwelling, consolidating built form within the residential curtilage and opening up the site's frontage. This would prevent the ad-hoc spread of built form across the site while ensuring that the development retains a farmstead character.

The overarching design approach comprises a clustered barn-style form, with pitched roof forms with generous eaves informed by traditional agricultural barns. The style of

the dwelling would respond positively to the site's rural setting in this respect, and there is no objection to the loss of the existing dwelling and outbuildings from a design perspective.

The proposal would also respect the mixed vernacular within this stretch of Wick Hill Lane. The proposed material palette comprises red/orange facing brick, clay roof tiles and timber framing which would support the development's barn style and would not be uncharacteristic. The incorporation of symmetrical elements in respect of the position of fenestration and the wings further support the visual amenity of the scheme and overall, a positive design.

Separate dwellings

Regarding the proposed 2no. separate dwellings, while their form and appearance would mark a significant change from the existing agricultural buildings, they would be appropriately sited within the context of the existing built form and would not constitute a significant enlargement of footprint. They are also well designed in respect of their barn style appearance, proportionate and symmetrical features and appropriate height and massing. Further details on external materials are secured by condition.

While 1 and 2 bed dwellings are out of character with neighbouring properties, their density is appropriate while their bulk and appearance would not have an adverse visual impact from the adjoining byway. In this case, it is also considered more appropriate for the existing agricultural buildings to be replaced if the intention is to change the use of this part of the site to residential (as established by the Prior Approval scheme) from a design perspective.

Overall, for the reasons discussed above it is considered that the proposal would have an acceptable impact on the verdant character of the area and the wider landscape character in accordance with the aforementioned policies.

Housing Mix:

Policy CP5 of the Core Strategy requires an appropriate mix of dwelling types, tenures and sizes so that the housing needs of the community are met. Policy TB05 of the MDD Local Plan requires an appropriate housing mix which reflects a balance between the underlying character of the area and both the current and projected needs of households.

In this case, the proposal would create 1no. 1 bed flat and 1no. 2 bed dwelling. While this would be out of character with the area, given the fall-back position for the site established under the Prior Approval consent there are no objections in this respect. Moreover, it is acknowledged that the delivery of smaller sized dwellings plays a role in meeting the need for a mix of housing sizes locally.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy aims to protect neighbouring amenity and further guidance on this is contained in Section 4 of the Borough Design Guide SPD. Due to

the existing relationship with neighbouring properties and the proposed siting of the dwellings there are no concerns relating to potential harm on neighbour amenity in respect of loss of light, overbearing or overlooking impact.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Policy CC07 and Appendix 2 of the MDD Local Plan set out the parking standards for development, noting that these should be regarded as a starting point with each site assessed on its own merits. P3 of the Borough Design Guide SPD notes that parking spaces are to be a minimum of 5m x 2.5m. The minimum dimensions for a single garage space are 6m x 3m. P3 of the Borough Design Guide SPD notes that parking spaces should be safe and convenient, close to the dwelling and sited to minimise impact upon safety.

The Council's Highways Officer has raised no objection to the existing vehicular accesses being retained for the proposed development, while the parking and turning area retained for the replacement dwelling meet the Council's standards and is acceptable.

In respect of the separate dwellings, future residents would share a triple garage underneath the 1 bed flat and 3no. parking spaces within the turning courtyard at its frontage. The proposed parking provision meets the Council's standards and is acceptable, subject to further details on cycle parking being secured by condition.

The Council's Highways Officer has raised concern with the proposed driveway clearance falling short of the minimum 6m by approximately 1.1m, suggesting that the garage with flat above is set back by 1.1m or part of the landscaping is incorporated into the courtyard. While this is duly noted, this would either have an adverse knock-on effect on the amenity space available for future residents or the landscaping scheme. On balance, given that all vehicle manoeuvring will take place within the site, well back from the public highway, the proposed arrangement would not have an adverse effect on public highway safety and any limited harm to convenience arising from the parking arrangement would be outweighed by the loss of amenity space or landscaping in this instance.

Amenity Space:

Policy TB08 of the MDD Local Plan relates to the provision of onsite open space, sport and recreational facilities within residential development. R16 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires a minimum depth of 11m for rear gardens and a 1m setback from the site boundary to allow access thereto. It should receive direct sunlight and be capable of accommodating play, clothes drying and storage.

Notwithstanding the recommended 11m depth, there are no other defined standards for garden spaces and it is considered that the size of the garden spaces for the separate dwellings are an appropriate size for the day to day activities as referred to in the Borough Design Guide SPD for 1 and 2 bedroom units respectively. It is therefore considered that the proposed external space would provide a satisfactory living environment for future occupiers of the development.

Flooding and Drainage:

Policy CC09 of the MDD Local Plan requires consideration of flood risk from historic flooding and policy CC10 requires sustainable drainage methods and the minimisation of surface water flow.

The site and access thereto is located within Flood Zone 1 and the proposal represents no additional flood risk or vulnerability. In principle, the proposal is therefore acceptable in terms of Policy CC09.

A Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Drainage Strategy (Glanville, April 2025) has been submitted in support of the application which confirms that the site is at very low risk from all sources of flooding, including fluvial, surface water and groundwater.

The FRA demonstrates that the development would not increase flood risk on site or elsewhere. A comprehensive drainage strategy confirms that surface water would be managed using a SuDS-led approach, comprising infiltration-based drainage where feasible, including permeable paving and geocellular soakaways, with runoff restricted to greenfield rates. The drainage strategy has been designed to accommodate the 1-in-100-year storm event plus climate change allowance, with no exceedance or on-site flooding predicted.

No objection is therefore raised on drainage or flood risk grounds.

Trees:

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.

A Tree Survey Report, Impact Appraisal & Tree Protection Details (Venners Arboriculture, revised September 2025) has been submitted in support of the application which demonstrates that 7 trees would be removed to facilitate the proposed development. The Council's Landscape Architect has raised no objection to their removal, which has reduced from the original submission, noting that the final landscaping scheme will result in the net gain of trees within the site. Final details are to be agreed by condition.

The Landscape Architect broadly agrees that the retained trees can be protected during the development. However, additional measures e.g., temporary ground mats to minimise impact from construction vehicles will be required as a precautionary approach. The applicant has agreed to submit a final Arboricultural Method Statement via condition. Subject to conditions, the proposal would comply with MDD Local Plan policy CC03.

Ecology:

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF is clear that new development should contribute to and enhance the natural environment by minimising impact on and providing net gains for

biodiversity and Paragraph 193 states that planning permission should be refused if significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated or compensated for. Policy TB23 of the MDD Local Plan requires the incorporation of new biodiversity features, buffers between habitats and species of importance and integration with the wider green infrastructure network.

Protected & Priority Species

An Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) (Ecology by Design, June 2025) has been submitted in support of the application which concludes that potential impacts on species during and following the development are capable of being mitigated to ensure no adverse ecological harm.

Mitigation and feature compensation proposals for the construction phase are outlined in the EclA, as well as to secure the detail and implementation of this mitigation through a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) condition. The Ecology Officer considers that this is an appropriate course of action and therefore raises no objection subject to the CEMP being secured by condition. A sensitive lighting plan is also secured by condition to ensure that the development does not create long-term operational impacts on commuting or foraging bats.

Following the removal of the proposed ha-ha landscape feature, the Ecology Officer is also satisfied that the proposed development is unlikely to adversely affect amphibians & reptiles, birds and other protected and priority species, subject to mitigation measures being agreed in full prior to the commencement of the development. This is secured by condition. The EclA also recommends a series of biodiversity enhancements including integrated bird & bat boxes. The Ecology Officer raises no objection to these enhancements in principle subject to further detail being secured by condition.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

BNG is now mandatory for major and minor planning applications unless the proposed development meets the exception criteria set out in paragraph 17 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024 and The Environment Act 2021 (Commencement No. 8 and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2024. The proposal does not meet the exception criteria and is subsequently required to demonstrate that there would be a BNG of 10% or more following the development.

The statutory framework for BNG involves the discharge of the statutory biodiversity gain condition following the grant of planning permission and prior to commencement of the development. The relevant Planning Practice Guidance states that prior to the determination of an application the LPA must be confident that the statutory condition is capable of being discharged, however full detail does not need to be submitted to the LPA prior to determination.

Throughout the course of the application there have been significant discussions between the Council's Officers and the applicant regarding the classification of the

habitat baseline and other matters to ensure that BNG is deliverable following the development. Following these discussions, a revised BNG metric has been submitted which shows that the development would result in a 15.07% habitat unit loss and 0.57 hedgerow unit loss without proper mitigation/compensation. The submitted Ecological Impact Assessment outlines proposals for the creation of new habitats which will be proposed in full within the biodiversity gain plan, including the planting of trees within the wider site and a new hedgerow adjacent to the southern boundary.

The applicant has indicated that most of the new habitats will be created outside of the application site's boundaries but within the wider site within their ownership (as indicated by the blue line on the submitted Location Plan). Taking into consideration the information submitted in support of this application and the subsequent discussions, including the indicative proposals, the Ecology Officer has advised they are confident that the statutory condition is capable of being discharged and no further information is required prior to the determination of the application.

The delivery of these measures will need to be secured through a mix of conditions and a planning obligation. A soft landscaping detail condition and separate HMMP condition will secure the detail of the final landscaping and plan for ongoing management. A planning obligation will need to be applied to secure monitoring of the management of these habitats (on-site and off-site) and ensure that they are being provided for the full thirty-year period. This forms part of the completed S106 Legal Agreement dated 20 May 2026. Subject to this being secured, the LPA can be satisfied that the proposed development would comply with the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirement and no objections are raised on ecological grounds.

Building Sustainability:

Policy CC04 of the MDD Local Plan and the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD require sustainable design and the conservation of resources, and R21 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that new development contribute to environmental sustainability and the mitigation of climate change.

It should be noted that the above policy (CC04) is out of date and written before the Council's declared Climate Emergency. For this reason, the Council produced a Climate Change Interim Policy Position Statement (CCIPPS) (2022) which outlines what is expected of development proposals in light of the climate emergency. In relation to policy requirements outlined in CC04, it should be noted that the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 has now been withdrawn, and now applicants must meet the interim Future Homes Standard (as required by Building Regulations) of a minimum 31% reduction in emissions, in line with the CCIPPS.

As discussed in the 'Principle of Development' section above, a Sustainability Statement has been submitted in support of the application which provides clear evidence on the scheme's sustainability aims, particularly in respect of water and energy efficiency, especially for the replacement dwelling. To ensure that the development meets the interim Future Homes Standard, a condition is recommended to ensure that no dwelling is occupied until compliance has been confirmed by an accredited assessor.

Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area:

Policy CP8 of the Core Strategy states that development which alone or in combination is likely to have a significant effect on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area will be required to demonstrate that adequate measures to avoid and mitigate any potential adverse effects are delivered.

In this case the application includes a net increase of two dwellings on a site that is within 5km of the SPA. In line with Policy CP8, mitigation measures in the form of a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) contribution and Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) contribution form part of the completed s106 legal agreement which was signed on 20/05/2026.

Planning Balance and Conclusion:

The starting point for decision making is the development plan. However, as set out in the Principle of Development section of this report, paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the NPPF is engaged and this also requires the proposal to be considered against the policies of the NPPF taken as a whole. The tilted balance does not however remove the primacy of the development plan.

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF sets out that achieving sustainable development means that development should satisfy three overarching objectives in relation to economic, social and environmental benefits.

Economically the development would enable job creation during the construction period although this would be very limited given the scale of the development. There would also be contribution to the local economy in the long term with consumer spending on goods and services within the immediate and wider area, alongside some indirect benefit arising from the payment of Council Tax and CIL. Although the economic benefits are not unique to this scheme, the development is considered to perform a positive economic role and to hold moderate weight in favour of the development in the planning balance.

Regarding the **social** role, while the proposal would not make a significant contribution to the Council's housing land supply position, the provision of two net additional smaller-sized dwellings and the diversification of the housing mix within the wider area is welcomed. Therefore, a limited positive social role is performed and this holds limited weight in favour of the development in the planning balance.

Regarding its **environmental** role, while the proposed replacement dwelling would be significantly larger than the existing residential development, the proposal would not result in adverse encroachment of the open countryside and have an acceptable visual and spatial impact on the site's verdant setting. The proposal would replace the existing dwelling and substitute the three approved conversion dwellings with two new dwellings, resulting in a net reduction in residential units compared with the fallback position. This is a more favourable outcome from a design and character perspective. While it is recognised that prior approval schemes operate under a different legislative framework, they nevertheless establish that residential

development on the site is already accepted in principle to a significant extent.

No objection has been raised from the Council's Highways Team in respect of sustainable accessibility given the established fall-back position, and it has been adequately demonstrated that there would be no adverse impact on protected or priority species with the development capable of achieving Biodiversity Net Gain. Sufficient information has also been submitted to demonstrate that the proposal would result in significant improvements in energy and water efficiency in respect of the replacement dwelling, and all dwellings would be required to meet the Interim Future Homes Standard achieve a reduction in CO2 emissions well above the current policy requirements.

Moderate weight is afforded to the fallback position, as there is a realistic prospect of the lawful implementation of residential development on the site, which is more than a purely theoretical possibility and therefore represents a genuine material consideration in accordance with established case law and guidance. The fallback is relevant to the overall planning judgment as it indicates that a broadly similar form of development could occur in any event, thereby reducing the weight that can reasonably be attributed to the identified harms. By contrast, the sustainability benefits of the proposal attract only limited to moderate weight. While the scheme would contribute towards the delivery of housing and make some use of an accessible location relative to nearby services, the site's rural context and reliance on private vehicle use mean that these benefits are not substantial when assessed against the environmental objective of sustainable development.

Overall, while limited environmental harm arising from the size and scale of the replacement dwelling has been identified, it is considered that this has been sufficiently mitigated and the proposal represents a more favourable outcome than the fall-back position for the site's development. Overall, the proposed development is considered to perform a positive role.

No adverse impacts have been identified when considering all relevant material considerations and any potential negative, or less than desirable, impacts are considered to be adequately dealt with or offset via conditions and obligations.

In the light of the above and with due regard to all comments received, it is considered that no adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits arising from the proposed development when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.

The application is therefore recommended for **approval** subject to conditions and the completed S106 Agreement.

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:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	26 May 2026
Earliest date for decision:	10 November 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	27/05/26

Screening Assessment and Appropriate Assessment

In the light of the “Sweetman Judgement” (People Over Wind and Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta, April 2018), the comments below comprise an Appropriate Assessment which includes advice on necessary avoidance and mitigation measures which is consistent with the advice provided to the Planning Inspectorate on such matters.

Summary of Response

WBC, in consultation with Natural England, has formed the view that any net increase in residential development between 400m and 5km straight-line distance from the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA) is likely to have a significant effect on the integrity of the SPA, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects. An Appropriate Assessment has been carried out which includes regard to mitigation requirements.

This site is located approximately **4.3 km** (measured from the access road to the application site) from the boundary of the SPA and therefore is likely to result in an adverse effect on the SPA, unless it is carried out together with appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures.

On commencement of the proposed development, a contribution (calculated on a per-bedroom basis) is to be paid to Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) towards the cost of measures to avoid and mitigate against the effect upon the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, as set out in WBC’s Infrastructure Delivery Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

The strategy is for relevant developments to make financial contributions towards the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) in perpetuity as an alternative recreational location to the SPA and financial contributions towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) measures.

In this instance, the proposed development would result in a net increase of **1 no. 1-bedroom dwelling and 1 no. 2-bedroom dwelling** within 5km of the SPA which results in a total SANG contribution of **£3,617.57**.

The proposed development is required to make a contribution towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) which is also calculated on a per bedroom basis. Taking account of the per bedroom contributions this results in a total SAMM contribution of **£1,392**.

The total SPA related financial contribution for this proposal is **£5,009.57**. The applicant **must agree** to enter into a S106/s111 agreement to secure this contribution prior to occupation of each dwelling. Subject to the completion of the S106 agreement, the proposal would not lead to an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA and would comply with SEP Saved Policy NRM6, policy CP8 of the Core Strategy, and the NPPF.

1. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) as amended

In accordance with The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) as amended, Regulation 63, a competent authority (in this case Wokingham Borough Council (WBC)), before deciding to undertake, or give any consent, permission or other authorisation for, a plan or project which—

- a. is likely to have a significant effect on a European site...(either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and
- b. is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site.

must make an appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan or project for that site in view of that site's conservation objectives.

A person applying for any such consent, permission or other authorisation must provide such information as WBC may reasonably require for the purposes of the assessment or to enable it to determine whether an appropriate assessment is required.

WBC must for the purposes of the assessment consult Natural England (NE) and have regard to any representations made by that body. It must also, if it considers it appropriate, take the opinion of the general public, and if it does so, it must take such steps for that purpose as it considers appropriate. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment, and subject to Regulation 64 (Considerations of overriding public interest), WBC may agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site.

In considering whether a plan or project will adversely affect the integrity of the site, WBC must have regard to the manner in which it is proposed to be carried out or to any conditions or restrictions subject to which it proposes that the consent, permission or other authorisation should be given.

2. Stage 1 Screening for Likely Significant Effects

WBC accepts that this proposal is a 'plan or project' which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European Site. The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) is a European designated site which affects the borough, and WBC must ensure that development does not result in an adverse impact on the SPA. The potential adverse effects on the integrity of the SPA include recreational activities from inside the SPA and air pollution from inside and outside the SPA.

At this stage WBC cannot rule out 'likely significance effects' on the SPA (alone or in combination with other plans or projects) because the proposal could undermine the Conservation Objectives of these sites. This is because the proposal lies within **5 km** of the SPA and:

- represents a net increase in dwellings within 400m - 5km of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) which will lead to an increase in local population and a potential increase in recreational activity on the SPA

As the 'likely significance effects' cannot be ruled out at this stage an Appropriate Assessment must be undertaken.

3. Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment

Based on the information proposed by the applicant, WBC must decide whether or not an adverse effect on site integrity (alone or in combination with other plans or projects) can be ruled out. Mitigation may be able to be provided so that the proposal is altered to avoid or reduce impacts.

The following policies and guidance set out WBC's approach to relevant avoidance and

mitigation measures which have been agreed with Natural England. For the majority of housing developments this will comprise the provision of (or contribution towards) Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and a contribution towards the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project. Developers will be required to secure an appropriate financial contribution for the provision of SANG and to the SAMM project through an obligation in a s106 agreement.

For SDL development (and occasionally some other larger non SDL developments) within 5km of the SPA, SANG is required at a minimum of 8 ha per 1,000 new residents, constructed and delivered to Natural England's quality and quantity standards and a contribution towards pan SPA access management and monitoring (as advised by the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board). For SDL development (and occasionally some other larger non SDL developments) between 5 and 7km, the proposals will need to be individually assessed but it is likely that SANG will be required on site in line with Natural England's quality and quantity standards, although the exact requirement will be agreed having regard to evidence supplied.

a. Policies and Guidance

For this proposal the following guidance and policies apply:

- South East Plan (May 2009) Policy NRM6 (Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area)
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100528160926/http://www.gos.gov.uk/gos/e/planning/regionalPlanning/815640/>
- Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010) Policy CP8 (Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area) sets out the approach WBC will take in order to protect the TBH SPA
<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Final%20adopted%20Core%20Strategy%20inc.%20cover.pdf>
- Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010) Policy CP7 (Biodiversity) sets out the approach WBC will take in order to protect national and international nature conservation sites
<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Final%20adopted%20Core%20Strategy%20inc.%20cover.pdf>
- Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014) Policy TB23 (Biodiversity and Development)
<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Adopted%20MDD.pdf>
- Infrastructure Delivery and Contributions SPD (2011)
<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Adopted%20Infrastructure%20De~nd%20Contributions%20SPD.pdf>

The project as proposed would not adversely impact on the integrity of the SPA if avoidance and mitigation measures are provided as stipulated by these policies and guidance.

b. SPA Avoidance and Mitigation Measures

i) The provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and its ongoing maintenance in perpetuity.

In accordance with the development plan, the proposed development will be required to provide alternative land to attract new residents away from the SPA. The term given to this alternative land is Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).

As this development is not part of an SDL, the developer may make a payment contribution

towards strategic SANGs in line with schedule below (most likely this will be at Rooks Nest Wood SANG although it is subject to SANGs capacity in the right location within Wokingham borough). An occupation restriction will be included in the Section 106 Agreement in order to ensure that the contribution has been made prior to occupation of the dwellings. This gives the certainty required to satisfy the Habitats Regulations in accordance with South East Plan Policy NRM6 (iii) and Core Strategy Policy CP8

The development will result in a net increase of **2 no. dwellings**, broken down as follows: **1 no. 1-bedroom dwelling and 1 no. 2-bedroom dwelling**. Depending on the dwelling mix, the level of SANG payments is set out as follows:

No. of bedrooms	SANG Contribution 5km	Aggregate SANG Contribution
1 bedroom	£1,567.98	£1,567.98
2 bedrooms	£2,049.59	£2,049.59
3 bedrooms	£2,690.93	£0
4 bedrooms	£3,546.86	£0
5 bedrooms	£4,240.62	£0
Total SANG Contribution		£3,617.57

ii. Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Contribution

The proposed development will also be required to make a contribution towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM). This project funds strategic visitor access management measures on the SPA to mitigate the effects of new development on it.

From 1st April 2023 SAMM contributions have been updated across the 11 Local Authorities affected by the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. Following engagement with Natural England, the Joint Strategic Partnership Board agreed this change is necessary to ensure sufficient income is raised to cover the costs of the SAMM project in perpetuity. Without this change the SAMM project would be at risk of being unable to deliver the objectives of the SAMM project, and therefore secure positive outcomes for the SPA

The level of contributions is calculated on a per-bedroom basis. The application for this development is for **1 no. 1-bedroom dwelling and 1 no. 2-bedroom dwelling**. Depending on the dwelling mix, the level of SAMM payments is calculated as follows:

No. of bedrooms	SAMM Contribution 5km	Aggregate SAMM Contribution
1 bedroom	£582.00	£582.00
2 bedrooms	£810.00	£810.00
3 bedrooms	£1,110.00	£0
4 bedrooms	£1,306.00	£0
5+ bedrooms	£1,492.00	£0
Total SAMM Contribution		£1,392

Prior to the permission being granted the applicant must enter into a Section 106 Agreement based upon the above measures.

4. Conclusion

An Appropriate Assessment has been carried out for this development in accordance with the Habitats Regulations 2017. Without any appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures the Appropriate Assessment concludes that the development is likely to have a significant effect upon the integrity of the SPA with the result that WBC would be required to refuse a planning application.

Provided that the applicant is prepared to make a financial contribution (see above) towards the costs of SPA avoidance and mitigation measures, the application will be in accordance with the SPA mitigation requirements as set out in the relevant policies above.

WBC is convinced, following consultation with Natural England, that the above measures will prevent an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA. Pursuant to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and Regulation 63(5) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) as amended, and permission may be granted.

If the applicant does not agree with the above mitigation and does not enter into a Section 106 Agreement to secure the measures, then the application must be refused using the following reason for refusal.

5. Example Reason for Refusal

In the absence of a planning obligation to secure suitable avoidance and mitigation measures and access management monitoring arrangements, in terms that are satisfactory to the Local Planning Authority (LPA), the LPA is unable to satisfy itself that the proposals include adequate mitigation measures to prevent the proposed development from having an adverse effect on the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, in line with the requirements of Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended and Article 6(3) of Directive 92/43/EEC. The proposal would be contrary to Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan, Policies CP8 and CP4 of the Core Strategy.

Date:

27/05/2026

Signed:

