

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	250637
Site Address:	Land at Woosehill Meadows, Wokingham
Expiry Date:	30 July 2025
Site Visit Date:	30/04/2025
Proposal: Full application for the proposed creation of a new wildlife pond.	

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
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 CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation DM3 - Protection of Habitats and Species DM10 - Flood Risk
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage FD3 – River corridors and watercourses NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows DH6 – Archaeology HC3 – Local Green Space
Other	National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
203617	Full application for proposed works to reconnect	Approved –

	a 340 metre length of historic river channel of the Emm Brook through Riverside Park, to bypass the existing weir. With associated excavation, silt removal/storage and landscaping works, plus the erection of 2 no. 8 metre x 3.5 metre wooden bridges to maintain existing access for pedestrians and maintenance vehicles, following removal of an existing piped culvert.	26/10/2023
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CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Highways – No objection
WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection subject to conditions
WBC Ecology Newts
WBC Ecology – No response received
Berkshire Archaeology – No objection subject to conditions

External

The Environment Agency – No objection subject to conditions

REPRESENTATIONS

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

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site is located within the Woosehill Meadows public open space, directly adjacent to the Emmbrook river.

This submission seeks full planning permission for the creation of a wildlife pond, which is pursuant to a requirement secured by legal agreement under application 203617. This would relocate the existing off-line pond (which is proposed to be on-line as a part of the consented works) and mitigate the loss of any wetland habitats.

Background/ History:

In October 2023, full planning permission was granted by members of the planning committee for *“Full application for proposed works to reconnect a 340 metre length of historic river channel of the Emm Brook through Riverside Park, to bypass the existing weir. With associated excavation, silt removal/storage and landscaping works, plus the erection of 2 no. 8 metre x 3.5 metre wooden bridges to maintain existing access for pedestrians and maintenance vehicles, following removal of an existing piped culvert.”* under reference 203617.

A requirement of the extant planning consent (203617) via S106 legal agreement was the submission of a planning application for an offline habitat pond, to mitigate the loss of the existing offline pond which as a part of the works is proposed to be shifted 'online' in connection with reinstating the paleo channel. Failure to mitigate the loss of an existing off-line pond would render the diversion works unacceptable, given the loss of a suitable habitat for the common frog and other locally important amphibians.

With this in mind, the committee recommendation outlines that approval of the Emm Brook diversion works of notable ecological and riparian benefit is dependent on said Offline Pond Provision, via the following steps

1. *The applicant will commit to submitting a planning application for the creation of an offline pond within Woosehill Meadows for approval in writing by the Local Planning Authority.*
2. *The applicant will commit to creating a compensation pond within Woosehill Meadows.*
3. *The Council will commit to supplying a suitable location and maintaining the pond once it has been created.*

In justifying the planning obligation, officers outlined in paragraph 60 of the approved committee report pursuant to 203617 *"It is reasonable for the local planning authority to take the view that an offline compensation pond must be created within the public open space of Woosehill Meadows as a mitigation measure. Therefore, details covering an off-line mitigation pond have been secured via S106 which has been agreed by the applicant. A further Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been submitted by WBC in agreeing to provide land for this pond delivery and to maintain it following completion."*

This application addresses this requirement through the creation of a new offline pond within close proximity to the existing to be added to the reinstated paleo channel, in accordance with the indicative plan provided within 203617 and within the signed legal agreement. This will ensure that no amphibians are displaced by the re-connection works, and provide a net benefit for biodiversity in accordance with paragraph 192 of the NPPF.

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.

The NPPF further outlines in paragraph 193 that development which solely intends to support biodiversity and ecological enhancements shall be supported. 193(d) states *“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 principle of creating a wildlife pond within Woosehill meadows is acceptable when assessed against local and national policy, particularly with reference to the extant permission 203617 which requires the creation of an offline wildlife pond (with reference to the background/ history section above).

Character of the Area:

The proposal would involve the excavation of the ground to create an off-line wildlife pond. The pond is 163m² in area with a maximum depth of 1.5m which will result in 100m³ of material that will be disposed of off site. There will be no bund around the pond which will be naturally lined with the existing clay on the site. The pond will mostly be fed by ground water infiltration and rainwater as it sits within a naturally low lying depression. No new surface water or ground water connections will be created.

Woosehill Meadows as existing has a mixed green and riparian habitat, including existing off-line ponds. Adding to this diverse blue and green infrastructure network via the provision of a new off-line pond would enhance the character of the area, further permitted users of the open space to interact with nature created by the new habitat.

The proposal would not harm the character and appearance of the area, and would in fact enhance it, in full compliance with CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy.

Neighbouring Amenity:

The proposal would have no significant or detrimental impact 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 application site falls within flood zone 3, given its proximity to the existing River Emmbrook. The proposal is accompanied by a site-specific flood risk assessment which identifies the proposal would not increase flood risk on site, nor elsewhere. On the contrary, it would provide a betterment due to increases in off-line storage

capacity which has the twin benefit of providing a natural wetland habitat.

Fig. 4 of the Drainage Statement and Flood Risk Assessment shows the proposed pond in an area at higher risk from surface water flooding greater than 3.3% in any given year. The plug plants will quickly knit together covering any exposed soil and providing further flora-based flood resilience. It is supported that groundworks will not take place in times of high rainfall or increased flood risk.

Further to consultation, the objection initially raised by the Environment Agency was withdrawn given an updated flood risk assessment was prepared by the applicant. The EA have requested this is secured by condition to ensure the proposed management and mitigation measures are secured in full. A condition to this effect has been appended to the decision notice.

Landscape and Trees:

There are several trees identified by the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Associated and are on the Ancient Tree Inventory as 'Notable' trees. An area TPO 12/1973 extends along the eastern boundary of the site and consists of Oak, Willow, Hawthorn.

The site is located within Landscape Character Area J1 ' Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay', one of the guidelines states; 'enhance wetland habitats associated with the Emm Brook through appropriate management, seek to extend the area of wetland habitats through recreating of wetlands (including water meadows and wet woodland)'. The application broadly complies this this ambition.

The pond has been designed to fit within the existing Greenway and root protection zone of the neighbouring woodland. All residual materials arising from excavation will be removed from site and any waste generated recycled were possible or otherwise disposed of responsibly in line with current waste regulations. All work will take place with a view to causing the least harm possible under an Environmental Risk Assessment with a detailed ground search taking place to ensure no species may be disturbed during the excavation process.

In order for the proposal to meet with Policy CC03iid) of the Local Plan 'to protect and retain trees, hedges and other landscape features', development is required to be outside of the root protection area (RPA) of trees/woodland in close proximity to development. The proposal complies with this requirement.

It is proposed to use the marginal plants from the existing pond in the paleo channel and weed out the invasive Himalayan Balsam. The new planting will be protected from dogs by installing a dead hedge along the west side of the pond next to the path.

Subject to securing landscaping and tree protection measures by planning condition, WBC Trees and Landscape raise no objection.

Ecology:

The proposed pond location is within low diversity native herbaceous grassland which is regularly mown and of low ecological value. It is proposed to plant the new pond

with a wide range of species, locally sourced plug plants that will provide refuge and forage for a wide range of species not just aquatic, such as common comfrey that are a valuable source of nectar for bees and other insects and host to Painted Lady Butterflies and lots of moths. This constitutes an ecological benefit of the proposal in favour of the development, and no significant harms are to arise from excavation or construction.

A habitat plan as well as biodiversity net gain metric have been submitted in support of the application. It is noted that no response was received from WBC Ecology, however, the LPA have nothing to suggest that the baseline and target established are unable to be achieved. Achieving the agreed target is secured by a planning condition requiring the submission of a habitat management and monitoring plan.

Conclusion:

Overall, with the above in mind, the proposal to create an off-line pond is acceptable and recommended for approval subject to conditions.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION	
Conditions agreed:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approval subject to conditions
Date:	21 July 2025
Earliest date for decision:	11 July 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	23/07/25

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Tree preservation order

AWE 12km zone

Greenway Routes

Wokingham-Winnersh Settled and Farmed Clay

Flood zone 3

Risk of surface water flooding

Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland