

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	251608
Site Address:	Hennerton Golf Club, Crazies Hill, Wargrave, RG10 8LT
Expiry Date:	8 September 2025
Site Visit Date:	21/08/2025
Proposal: Full application for the proposed replacement of existing 10m high driving range netting with 15m high netting.	

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 CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits CP12 – Green Belt
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping TB01 – Development within the Green Belt TB02 – Development adjoining the Green Belt 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 DM4 - Protection of Designated Landscape DM5 - Protection of the Countryside DM6 - Green Belt DM7 - Conserving the Historic Environment DM8 - Restoration of Minerals and Waste Developments DM9 - Protecting Health, Safety and Amenity DM10 - Flood Risk DM11 - Water Resources DM12 - Sustainable Transport Movements DM13 - High Quality Design of Minerals and Waste Development DM14 - Ancillary development DM15 - Site History
Wokingham Borough Local	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside SS6 – Development in the Green Belt

Plan Update (LPU)	NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE5 – Landscape and design NE6 – Valued landscapes
Other	National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document

NO RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection
WBC Public Rights Of Way – No response received
WBC Ecology Newts – No objection

External

N/A

REPRESENTATIONS

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

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site is located within Hennerton Golf Club, Crazies Hill falling in the designated countryside and Green Belt. The red line itself forms the existing driving range, directly adjacent to the existing club house, pro-shop and parking area.

This application seeks planning permission for the erection of metal stanchion extensions attached to those existing (a point clarified on officer site visit on 21/08/2025) and a replacement driving range net. 7 No stanchions are proposed to be raised from 10m to 15m and 2 No stanchions are proposed to be raised from 5m to 10m at the driving end of the range. This is proposed given the advancements in golf technology, meaning balls struck from the driving range travel further, posing additional risk to users of the club and members of the public. Increasing the height of the protective netting would mitigate this risk to both club users and members of the public. This application does not seek permission for any works which incur into the ground.

Principle of Development:

Section 70(2) TCPA 1990 and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (PCPA 2004) sets out that applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

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.

Countryside:

The site is located outside of settlement limits, within the designated countryside as prescribed by CP9 of the Core Strategy and as such development is only be acceptable if it complies with the principles stated in the Core Strategy, namely CP11 and CP12. These restrictive policies outline several exceptions where development within the open countryside and designated green belt may be accepted, where generally there is a presumption in favour of protection.

Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy requires development to maintain and enhance the high quality of the environment and prevent the coalescence of settlements. To achieve these aims, the policy outlines that subject to compliance with some of the 7 exceptions (1-3), 4, 5, 6 or 7, development will be permitted. It does however outline a degree of flexibility in that even if the 7 exceptions are not met, development is not 'normally' permitted.

In the case of this submission, the proposal complies with parts 1 and 2 and it assists in promoting recreation in the countryside and does not constitute excessive encroachment, however, does not comply with part 3 as it does not involve the conversion of an existing building. Whilst the proposal technically fails to meet the prescribed exceptions and thus would not 'normally' be accepted, it is important to consider the context of the overarching aims of CP11. In this respect, the proposal is compliant, in that a modest increase in height of the established driving range net would maintain the quality of the environment which in this location is historically tied with golfing and furthermore would not lead to the coalescence of settlements.

Green Belt:

Paragraph 143 of the NPPF (2024) lists five fundamental purposes of the Green Belt. These purposes are as follows:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Paragraphs 154 and 155 of the NPPF outline exceptions that do not constitute inappropriate development. The proposal complies with the provisions of paragraph 154(b) in that it provides “*appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation*” and furthermore “*preserve[s] the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.*” Accordingly, the development proposed would not be classified as inappropriate within the Green Belt.

CP12 of the Core Strategy states that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and this harm should be given substantial weight. The proposed operational development in this location constitutes appropriate development within the Green Belt (as detailed above) and thus complies with Core Strategy Policy CP12 from the LPA’s adopted Development Plan.

Emerging Local Plan Update:

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

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

Stage of Preparation

Regulation 19 version of the LPU was published and subject to consultation in September-November 2024. The Regulation 22 plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination in February 2025, and two Planning Inspectors have been appointed to examine (EiP) the plan. The examination of the local plan is ongoing, and the council responded to initial questions and requests from the Inspectors in May 2025.

As seen in High Court judgements, even when an emerging plan is at an advanced stage, it may still attract limited weight if further consultation and modifications are required, and the Inspector has yet to issue a final report. Wokingham’s LPU has several stages yet to be completed, including and the examination hearings and main modifications stages, which restricts the weight that can currently be afforded to non-substantive.

Unresolved Objections

The plan has been submitted with an accompanying Regulation 22 Consultation Statement. Appendix 15 to the Regulation 22 Consultation Statement sets out the main issues raised in representations to each policy and area of the LPU Proposed

Submission Plan and the council's response. This can be used to understand the scale of objections and so inform the weight that might be applied. These vary across policies and thus as relevant, LPU policies and their relevant weight are explained throughout this report.

Consistency with the NPPF

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

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

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

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

Alike to CP11 of the existing Core Strategy, SS5 of the LPU is tailored for development within the countryside and outlines numerous examples of where development may be acceptable. Criterion I states *"Outdoor sports, recreation, leisure and nature conservation development that is demonstrated to be necessary, reasonable and proportionate for the use"*. The proposal complies with this and thus is acceptable when assessed against the LPU with respect to development within the countryside. However, this is afforded no greater than limited weight.

Policy SS6 of the LPU (Green Belt) echoes the provisions of the NPPF with respect to protecting the borough's Green Belt from inappropriate development. Criterion B states *"The provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;"* As above, the proposal is compliant with this exception and thus is acceptable.

Character of the Area:

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that 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 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.

R1 and RD1 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 and R11 requires a coherent street character, including in terms of scale, rhythm, proportion and height.

Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states *“When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness.”*

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states: *“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: (b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.”*

The proposal seeks to erect stanchions extensions on top of the existing 10 metre and 5 metre structures respectively (as detailed in the site description section above), with no new built form proposed on the ground, subsequently raising the height of the floating protective net.

Whilst it is appreciated that 15 metre structures within the Green Belt are of significant height in the context of the surrounding area and thus do not explicitly contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, the proposed stanchion extensions and netting would not detrimentally impact the character of the area, as the site itself is characterised by its contributions to outdoor sport and thus ancillary infrastructure to support this would not unduly harm its underlying qualities.

The stanchions and netting as proposed would utilise matching materials (as secured by planning condition) and whilst visibility would be afforded on site (which is only privately accessible) there are no wider views afforded from the street scene given the site’s c350 metre set back from the roadway and encapsulation by gates. This the proposal does not stand contrary to CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy as well as the Borough Design Guide (BDG) in this respect despite the proposed height.

Notwithstanding lacking visibility from the street scene, officers note that clear views of this part of the site would be afforded from the WARG21 public right of way and thus changes to outlook and user experience must be considered. Whilst the driving range netting and stanchions of increased height would be visible, it is not substantially different from the existing situation, does not change the nature of the existing outlook, nor would constitute additional harm in terms of outlook for members of the public traversing the right of way.

With the above in mind, the proposal does not stand contrary to CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy nor the provisions of the BDG.

Neighbouring Amenity:

The proposal would not detrimentally impact neighbouring amenity with respect to noise, light, overlooking, overbearing or overshadowing impacts given its proximity away from residential dwellings.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

The proposal would not impact the existing access, nor parking provision on site. There are no objections raised on Highways grounds.

Flooding and Drainage:

The proposal would not result in any increased flood risk, either at the site or elsewhere given the stanchion extensions are attached to the existing structures and the netting is not ground anchored.

Landscape and Trees:

The proposal is located within the Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands LCA and within the Remenham Chalk Area Valued Landscape. The proposals to increase the height of netting around the existing driving range facility would not detrimentally impact the landscape character of the area given the existing nature of the site. Accordingly, WBC Trees and Landscape have raised no objections on landscape, visual and arboricultural grounds.

As the site sits within a Valued Landscape, the provisions of paragraph 187(a) applies. This states *“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)”

Whilst the proposed stanchion extensions would not necessarily enhance the Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape, given the existing use and stanchions in situ the proposal would not equally harm the character and positive features. Therefore, notwithstanding ‘prima-face’ conflict with the wording of 187(a), no objection is raised on landscape grounds.

Ecology:

The proposal would not have any detrimental impacts on protected species, given the stanchion extensions do not incur further into the ground, nor would the increased height stanchions harm foraging bats given proximity away from landscape features. This was confirmed at validation stage by WBC Ecology insofar as to confirm that no bat surveys were required. Furthermore, WBC Ecology Newts raise no objections on grounds of potential harm to Great Crested Newts.

It is noted that as of 02/04/2025, biodiversity net gain of at least 10% became mandatory for minor development which the proposal forms. However, the proposal does not include any additional built form on the ground, and in total impacts a threshold of habitat far below 25sqm. Thus, the development benefits from exemption in that biodiversity net gain is not required, nor a baseline habitat score to be agreed.

Conclusion:

Overall, with the above in mind, the proposal constitutes appropriate development within the Green Belt and countryside which does not harm the character of the area,

the landscape or adjoining public right of way. Accordingly, it is recommended for approval subject to conditions to secure matching materials and compliance with the approved details.

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

RECOMMENDATION	
Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approval subject to conditions
Date:	28 August 2025
Earliest date for decision:	6 August 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	28/08/25

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Land outside of settlement limits

Countryside

Metropolitan Green Belt

Public Rights of Way

Ground Water Consultation Zones

Bat Roost Suitability

Great Crested Newt Impact Zone

Landscape Character Assessment 2019