



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 June 2026

by **G Sibley MPLAN MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 July 2026

Appeal Ref: 6008845

Land adjoining Pound Lane, Hurst, Wokingham RG10 0RS

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr D Phillips against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 260049.
 - The development proposed is change of use of land to a mixed use comprising of agriculture (keeping of goats) and storage of building materials together with the erection of 2no. storage buildings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Background and Main Issues

2. The Council state that the agricultural use (keeping of goats) and associated feed store and boundary treatment, including the gate, would be acceptable and the matters in dispute relate to the storage of building materials and the development associated with that use. Accordingly, the main issues relevant to this appeal are:
 - Whether the builder's contractor yard would be in an appropriate location with regard to local development plan policies for a builder's storage yard
 - Whether the builder's contractor yard would be in a suitable location with regard to access to alternative transport; and
 - The effect of the builder's contractor yard on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Whether the builder's contractor yard would be in an appropriate location with regard to local development plan policies

3. Policy CP11 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy Development Plan Document (CS) establishes the approach to development beyond the settlement limits in order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the rural environment. Development will not normally be permitted unless it falls within one of the identified exceptions and satisfies the relevant criteria.
4. The appellant contends that the proposal should be regarded as a sustainable rural enterprise because the business serves the surrounding rural area and because

the appellant resides near to the site. However, these arguments fail to establish that the use itself is a rural enterprise within the meaning of Policy CP11.

5. A builder's contractor storage yard is not a countryside-dependent use. The appellant expressly accepts that the use can operate as well within a town as it can in the countryside. The business has no functional requirement for a rural location and a similar business within an urban area could still serve those in a rural area. It is not inherently linked to agriculture, forestry, recreation or any other countryside-based activity.
6. The benefits identified by the appellant relate primarily to personal convenience. The ability to store materials close to the appellant's dwelling, improve security and reduce journeys between existing storage locations may be advantageous to the current operator, but those benefits do not transform an otherwise conventional contractor's yard into a sustainable rural enterprise.
7. Moreover, planning permission ordinarily attaches to the land and not the individual. If permission were granted, the site could be occupied by another contractor operating at a different scale and without any connection to the nearby dwelling. The appellant's reliance on personal circumstances therefore provides little assistance when considering whether the proposal complies with Policy CP11 as a matter of principle. Accordingly, the proposal fails to satisfy the first criterion of Policy CP11.
8. The appeal site is largely undeveloped in character. The proposal would introduce a commercial storage compound comprising hardstanding, storage activity, fencing, gates, parking and associated vehicle movements. Whilst commercial uses exist at Oakley Farm to the north, those activities are principally contained within an established group of former agricultural buildings. The appeal proposal would extend commercial development onto an adjoining parcel of land that is currently open and undeveloped and remains visually and physically distinct from that complex.
9. Although the nearby commercial activity forms part of the site's context, Policy CP11 seeks to resist the incremental spread of commercial development into the countryside beyond established building groups. The presence of commercial uses at Oakley Farm does not, in itself, justify their extension onto neighbouring countryside land. I therefore find that the proposal would conflict with the second criterion of Policy CP11.
10. Given that the former structure on site has already been demolished, the scheme does not involve the replacement of buildings, and the proposal would be for a new building and thus the scheme would not comply with the third criterion of Policy CP11.
11. For the reasons set out above, the proposed builder's contractor yard would not be in an appropriate location with regard to local development plan policies. Consequently, whilst policy CP15 of the CS may not necessarily preclude employment development outside of the development limits, the proposal fails to comply with the objectives of Policies CP11 and CP15 and would not maintain the quality of the environment.

Whether the builder's contractor yard would be in a suitable location with regard to access to alternative transport

12. The appeal site is located within the open countryside with no bus stops nearby, no convenient access to rail services, no footways along much of Pound Lane and the unlit and narrow nature of the surrounding roads would be a hindrance to most cyclists and pedestrians accessing the site. As such, the site is evidently located in an area with poor access to public transport and users of the site would be reliant on private car use.
13. Neither the Development Plan nor the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires all employment uses to be located exclusively within settlements or in locations that are highly accessible by public transport. Paragraph 89 of the Framework recognises that sites intended to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be located beyond existing settlements and in areas that are not well served by public transport.
14. However, the Framework seeks to locate development where there is a genuine choice of transport modes and where unnecessary car dependency is minimised. Policy CP6 of the CS seeks development that is located where transport choice is available and it is evident that the appeal site is not in such a location and thus would conflict with the purposes of this policy.
15. The proposed use would principally involve the collection and storage of materials, and the appellant's evidence suggests that visits to the site would be relatively short in duration. Consequently, most trips would be undertaken by private vehicle. Whilst this reflects the appellant's intended operation, planning permission runs with the land and the site could in future be occupied by another operator within the approved use class, potentially generating a greater on-site presence and additional vehicle trips. Although the Framework acknowledges that rural employment sites may not always be well served by public transport, the proposal would nevertheless perpetuate a pattern of travel that is almost wholly dependent on the private car.
16. Whilst delivery vehicles would be required regardless of the site's location, this does not justify locating the development in a location offering no realistic alternative transport options.
17. I acknowledge that the Council's Highways Authority raised no objection to the proposal. The submitted swept-path analysis, access arrangements and parking provision were found acceptable, and the anticipated level of traffic generation would not materially affect the wider highway network. I have no reason to reach a different conclusion on those matters. However, the absence of highway safety concerns does not alter the fact that the site is not accessible by a genuine choice of transport modes.
18. The site is remote from public transport facilities, poorly connected for pedestrians and cyclists, and outside an established employment area. Furthermore, the proposed builder's contractor yard is not a use that requires a countryside location and could operate from sites with better access to services and transport choices. While the appellant's personal circumstances may reduce some journeys, the sustainability of the development must be assessed on the basis of the site itself. Taking these matters together, I find that the proposal would occupy an unsustainable location and would conflict with Policies CP1, CP3, CP6 and CP11 of

the CS and Policies CC01 and CC02 of the MDDL, which seek, amongst other matters, for development to reduce reliance on the private car and require locations offering a choice of transport modes.

Character and Appearance

19. The appeal site lies within the Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland Landscape Character Area, described as a simple farmed landscape characterised by open arable fields, pasture and mature hedgerows. However, while the site is designated countryside, it adjoins Oakley Farm, which now accommodates a range of commercial uses within former agricultural buildings. The immediate context is therefore characterised by a mix of residential, commercial and rural land uses rather than an extensive area of undeveloped countryside.
20. Having regard to the evidence and my site inspection, the appeal site and its surroundings do not fully reflect the typical characteristics of the wider Landscape Character Area. Although the landscape objectives remain relevant, assessment of the proposal must be based on the site's actual context.
21. The development would create two parcels of land separated by timber fencing and landscaping. The southern parcel would remain in agricultural use for the keeping of goats, maintaining an active rural function, whilst the northern parcel would accommodate the contractor's yard. Although the yard would introduce hardstanding and storage, it would be seen in the context of the existing commercial activity at Oakley Farm and would be of a modest scale. The proposed storage building is a simple timber-clad structure, comparable in scale and appearance to the agricultural building proposed as part of the scheme, and there is no substantive distinction between their design approaches.
22. The proposal would not result in the creation of a large industrial compound. Around 43% of the northern parcel would remain unsurfaced, with hardstanding limited to loose gravel rather than urban-style materials. The scale and intensity of the use would be modest, and the height of any external storage could be controlled by condition.
23. The scheme also incorporates retention of existing vegetation, new planting and hedgerow creation. The Council's Landscape and Trees Officer raised no objection and acknowledged the landscape enhancement opportunities arising from the planting strategy. The proposed landscaping would reinforce the site's vegetated character, strengthen screening and ensure the development remains well contained. The proposed fencing and gate would utilise timber materials common within the locality and, when viewed alongside the landscaping, would not appear out of character.
24. Importantly, the site occupies a well-screened and visually contained parcel of land at the end of a private track adjoining existing commercial activity. Public views are extremely limited, a matter accepted by the Council. Any effects on the wider landscape would therefore be localised and limited. Consequently, the proposal would not appear isolated or incongruous and would preserve the essential rural character of the locality. Taking all matters into account, I find that the development would not result in unacceptable harm to the character or appearance of the area and would accord with Policies CP1, CP3, CP11, CC03 and TB21, which seek development, amongst other matters, to be of an appropriate scale, character and

design quality for its surroundings as well as retain or enhance landscape character and its defining features.

Planning Balance

25. The proposal would facilitate the operation of an existing local business through the provision of secure storage, allowing materials and equipment to be consolidated from a number of separate locations. In addition, the proposed goat-rearing use would preserve and support agricultural activity on part of the site. The development would therefore give rise to modest economic benefits and has the potential to reduce some vehicle movements associated with the current arrangements. The site would also benefit from a comprehensive landscaping strategy and the reinstatement of a meadow area in agricultural use, both of which would contribute positively to the character of the site. These matters weigh in favour of the development.
26. However, the proposal would introduce a commercial storage use onto land outside settlement limits where development is controlled by Policy CP11. Whilst the appellant relies on the proximity of the site to his dwelling, improved security, operational efficiency and reduced travel, these are largely personal circumstances rather than land-use considerations. They do not demonstrate that the use itself is a rural enterprise or that it has a functional requirement for a countryside location.
27. The absence of unacceptable landscape harm does not mean the proposal complies with CP11. The identified concern relates not to visual impact but to the principle of introducing a commercial storage use into the countryside where the policy criteria are not met.
28. The proposal consequently conflicts with one of the fundamental purposes of Policy CP11, insofar as it seeks to maintain the quality of the environment. Furthermore, it would conflict with the purposes of CS Policies CP1, CP3 and CP6 as well as MDDL Policies CC01 and CC02 for development to be located where there are or will be at the time of the development choices in the mode of transport available which minimise the distance people need to travel. These matters attract substantial weight against the appeal proposal.
29. The Planning Practice Guidance makes clear that personal conditions will only rarely be appropriate and typically arise where development that would not normally be permitted may be justified on planning grounds because of who would benefit from the permission. For example, conditions limiting benefits to a particular class of people, such as new residential accommodation in the open countryside for agricultural or forestry workers, may be justified on the grounds that an applicant has successfully demonstrated an exceptional need.
30. Whilst the appellant would benefit from living approximately 50 metres from the site, allowing improved security and reducing some travel, these advantages amount to personal convenience and business efficiency rather than exceptional need. Similar benefits could be claimed by many businesses seeking countryside locations.
31. Moreover, there is no substantive evidence that the business could not continue operating from alternative sites or that this particular location is essential to its operation. Indeed, the appellant accepts that a builder's contractor yard is not inherently dependent upon a rural location and could operate equally within an

urban area. The suggestion that suitable urban sites are unavailable is not supported by compelling evidence.

32. Furthermore, the benefits associated with the appellant's proximity to the site are not permanent. The appellant could move house, dispose of the business or cease operating from the site, in which case the personal benefits relied upon would fall away whilst the permission would remain. The acceptability of the proposal must therefore be assessed on its planning merits rather than the circumstances of the current occupier.
33. Whilst the Framework supports the diversification of agricultural and other rural businesses and recognises that rural employment sites may need to be located beyond existing settlements, the appeal site is poorly related to services, facilities and public transport. The development would be heavily reliant on private vehicle use and would not accord with the Framework's objective of promoting sustainable transport choices.
34. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and the benefits would not outweigh the identified harm. I therefore find that there are no material considerations of sufficient weight to indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with the development plan.

Other Matters

35. I have considered whether the agricultural and builder's contractors storage elements could be separated. However, the appeal proposal was submitted as a single mixed-use development under one description of development with combined plans. I am not satisfied that it would be appropriate or practicable to grant permission for only part of the proposal on the basis of the plans before me.
36. In relation to pre-application advice, it is well established that such advice is not binding on a Council, so long as deviation from the advice given is justified. The submission of a planning application may give rise to new considerations which were not apparent at the pre-application stage.

Conclusion

37. Therefore, for the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

G Sibley

INSPECTOR