

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	250722
Site Address:	The Coach House, Five Horseshoes House, White Hill, Remenham Hill, Wokingham, RG9 3EP
Expiry Date:	17 July 2025
Site Visit Date:	8 May 2025
Proposal: Full planning application for the proposed erection of 1 no. detached dwelling following demolition of the existing Coach House, plus associated landscaping.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Green Belt
Countryside
Areas of Special Character
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Scale and Location of Development Proposals
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone
Landscape Character Assessment Area
Green Routes and Riverside Paths Consultation Zone

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 CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits CP12 – Green Belt CP17 – Housing Delivery
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB01 – Development within the Green Belt TB02 – Development adjoining the Green Belt TB05 – Housing Mix TB06 – Development of Private Residential Gardens

	TB07 – Internal Space Standards TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets TB26 – Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List

PLANNING HISTORY		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
65/49	Provision of new car park adjacent Five Horseshoes Hotel (temporary permission).	Approved – 31/12/1956
790/56	Continued use of land adjacent Five Horseshoes as a car park.	Approved – 23/11/1956
A/3/65	Floodlighting	Approved – 19/01/1965
R/67/65	New toilets	Approved – 24/03/1965
R/155/66	Extension to car park	Approved – 29/09/1986
O/70/66	Three houses on land adjoining	Refused – 25/02/1966 Appeal dismissed
45/73	Replace existing flood lighting with fluorescent tubes under eaves of building	Refused – 11/12/1973
CLU(P)75	A2 use	Approved – 19/12/1995
F/1995/63176	Change of use of public house (A3) to offices (B1)	Not proceeded with
F/1996/63589	Proposed change of use from public house (A3) to office use (B1) including demolition of rear wing.	Approved – 04/06/1998
191535	Application for Prior approval under Class O for conversion of office buildings B1(a) to 8No residential units C3 use.	Refused – 25/07/2019
192832	Prior approval submission for proposed conversion of office building (Use Class B1(a)) to 6 no. residential units (Use Class C3).	Approved – 04/12/2019
202264	Prior approval submission for proposed conversion of offices (Use Class B1(a)) to 1 no. residential dwelling (Use Class C3).	Approved – 23/10/2020

203089	Prior approval submission for the proposed change of use from office (Use Class B1(a)) to 3no. two bedroom residential units (Use Class C3).	Approved 05/01/2021	–
210465	Full planning application for the proposed erection of a three storey rear extension to existing building following demolition of existing two storey flat roofed extension to the rear, plus changes to fenestration.	Approved 8/07/2021	-
213116	Full application for the proposed erection of a part three storey, part single storey rear extension including roof terrace to form 3no residential units, following the demolition of existing two storey flat roofed rear extension and demolition of detached outbuilding, plus insertion of 6 no. rooflights and associated roof alterations.	Approved 29/11/2021	–
232970	Prior approval submission for the proposed change of use of offices (Use Class E) to 1 no. dwelling (Use Class C3).	Approved 16/01/2024	–

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No comments
WBC Drainage – No objection subject to a condition
WBC Highways – No objection subject to conditions
WBC Landscape and Trees - Objection
WBC Built Heritage Officer – No objection
WBC CIL – CIL liable development
WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments
WBC Ecology Newts – No objection subject to a condition
WBC Ecology – No objection subject to conditions

External

Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments

REPRESENTATIONS

Remenham Parish Council	No objection
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	One letter received in support of the proposal, however, with the request that the original brick boundary be retained where the demolition of the existing Coach House would take place. <i>(Officer note: Amended plans have been received with the requested being adhered to)</i>

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site is located on the northern side of Remenham Hill (A4130), to the rear of Five Horseshoes House. The site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt and designated countryside outside of defined settlement limits.

The immediate area comprises mainly residential properties, however, there is a petrol station in close proximity to the site. Development along the road is varied with regard to the type, age and size of the dwellings, contributing to the mixed character of the area. The wider area is verdant in character due to the mature vegetation that line the streets, synonymous with its rural context.

The Coach House sits to the east of the plot, which is rectangular in shape, and is set back from Remenham Hill Road (A4130) by approximately 20 metres. As the name implies, the application dwelling was a purpose-built Coach House to 'The Horseshoes' (now named Five Horseshoes House), and was built in circa 1850. It obtained permission to be used as a dwellinghouse in October 2020, through application 202264.

Proposal:

The proposed development is the demolition of the existing Coach House and the erection of a replacement dwelling. The existing dwelling is to the rear of Five Horseshoes House, and the proposed replacement dwelling is set further north into the plot, adjacent to the western boundary, on an existing area of hardstanding.

The proposed dwelling would not seek to be an exact replica of the 19th century building, however, it would draw strong architectural influence from the existing Coach House.

It is stated within the Planning Statement that the rationale behind the proposal is due to the inconvenient location of the existing dwelling within the site, with the relocation allowing for the new dwelling to be 'better' sited in terms of parking, amenity space etc.

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.

Development within the Green Belt and Countryside:

The application site is located within designated Green Belt and outside of settlement limits in the open Countryside. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts, with national policies for the protection of Green Belt land covered by Chapter 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Paragraph 142 of the NPPF states that, *"The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by*

keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence". Paragraph 143 of the NPPF states that the Green Belt serves 5 purposes, the one most relevant to this proposal is, "(c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment".

Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that, "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. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations."

Paragraph 154 of the NPPF states that the LPA should consider the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt as inappropriate, however, exceptions to this include:

(d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;

This is reflected in Core Strategy policies CP11 & CP12, with CP11 stating that proposals for replacement dwellings must:

- i) Bring about environmental improvements; or*
- ii) Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.*

While not directly relevant to this case, MDD Local Plan policy TB01 defines a "limited" increase in scale to an existing dwelling as a cumulative increase of generally no more than 35% increase in volume over and above the original dwelling. While specifically directed towards proposals for extensions to existing dwellings within the Green Belt, it is a useful guideline for assessing any cumulative increase in volume of built form on a site following the erection of a replacement dwelling.

Volume calculations have been submitted as part of the application. Following an assessment of these, the submitted plans and the site's planning history, the agreed volume calculations are that the proposed dwelling would result in a **21m³** increase from the existing Coach House, with the volume of the proposed dwelling being **298m³**, compared to the volume of the existing being **277m³**. This would equate to an approximate increase of **7.5%**.

The volume calculation clearly demonstrate that the proposal would not result in a materially larger dwelling than the existing, representing only a 7.5% increase in volume over and above the existing built form to be demolished. The development is considered to fall within the exception criteria stipulated in paragraph 154(d) of the NPPF and, by definition, would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore acceptable in principle subject to a wider assessment of other matters.

Impact on Openness & Character

Whilst it has been demonstrated that the proposal would not constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt, it should be noted that an assessment of a development in the Green Belt is not limited to this. The relocation of the dwelling in a position further away from existing built form has the potential to impact upon the openness of the Green Belt, thus requires special consideration.

MDD Local Plan policy TB01 states that development proposals will only be permitted where they maintain the openness of, and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in, the Green Belt. This is consistent with Section 13 of the NPPF. There is no definition of openness in the NPPF, however in Green Belt context, it is generally held to refer to the freedom from, or the absence of, development. Development does not necessarily need to be visible in order to harm the openness of the Green Belt.

There is not a distinctive pattern of built form on this section of Remenham Hill, with no set rhythm of gaps between buildings, varying sizes of plots and buildings, as well as varying separation distances between buildings and the adjacent highway. The proposed replacement dwelling would be sited in a different location to the existing dwelling, however, as established, the proposal would not result in a significant increase in built form. Accordingly, when considering the fundamental contribution of the site's built form to the wider open character of the Green Belt setting, there would not be a significant impact.

In fact, by virtue of relocating the Coach House further from Five Horseshoes House, this would alleviate the cramped form of development that is considered to be present at the application site, by proxy of the minimal separation between the existing dwellings. In this respect, it could be strongly argued that despite the encroachment being greater as a result of the proposal, the immediate impact is one where the development would enhance the openness of the site where it is most visible from public vantage points. This is considered to hold benefits for both the character of Remenham Hill and also the wider Green Belt setting.

Notwithstanding the encroachment identified above, it is noted that the location of the replacement dwelling has been carefully chosen to minimise this encroachment as much as possible. This is noted by the accompanying Planning Statement and Proposed Site Plan, which demonstrates that the dwelling does not breach the informal building line to the north of the site, created by the adjacent built form. This would preserve the openness to the north of the residential plots on this building line, which provides an important transition to the woodland and farmland beyond.

From an exclusively design perspective, it has already been noted that the replacement dwelling would draw strong architectural influence from the existing Coach House, which is considered a positive aspect due to the historic value of the site. New features such as the oak framed canopy and modernised building materials would be sympathetic to this rural context.

Overall, while a change to the visual appearance of the site will occur, the proposal would not have a significant spatial impact on the openness of the Green Belt for the reasons outlined above. It is therefore considered that the minimal increase in built form identified would not have an adverse spatial or visual impact on the openness of

the Green Belt, or negatively affect the character of Remenham Hill, in accordance with the aims of Development Plan policies TB01, CP1, CP3 & CP11.

Very Special Circumstances

As set out in paragraph 153 of the NPPF, there are circumstance where development should not be approved except in 'very special circumstances'. These circumstances will not exist, except where potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

As the proposal has not been considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt, nor would it adversely impact the openness of the site, very special circumstances are not deemed relevant in this instance.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Similarly to the existing Coach House, the proposed dwelling is orientated in a way that its principal elevation is not directed towards the front of the site, but instead the property runs parallel to the side boundaries. It is also noted that the location of the building is in close proximity to the adjacent dwellings to the west, 'Common Barn Cottages'.

Despite the unique context of the proposal as outlined above, it is noted that in relation to the properties to the east, 'Hectorage' and 'Rose Cottage', as well as the existing Five Horseshoes House, the separation distances proposed would be sufficient to avoid any unacceptable impact upon the amenities of the current and future occupants of these dwellings.

With regard to the impact upon Common Barn Cottages, the associated site visit demonstrated the existence of a large and mature hedgerow along the western boundary of the site, which is shown on the approved plans to be retained. Owing to the relatively modest scale of the proposed dwelling, the presence of this hedge would adequately offset any issues arising from the close proximity of the proposal and the neighbouring cottages. In any case, the sloping roof form and minimal fenestration on the rear elevation would provide further mitigation in this regard.

Built Heritage:

Owing to its historical context, as outline previously, the Coach House is considered a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). The building draws its significance from numerous perspectives, notably the historic interest.

Following an initial review of the application, the Built Heritage Officer (BHO) raised an objection to the development on the basis that the demolition of The Coach House would result in the equivalent to substantial harm through the total loss of the NDHA. It should also be noted however that as part of this initial response, the BHO was complementary of the replacement building, concluding that *"The overall scale, massing and detailing are perfectly appropriate in relation to the host building and wider context, and thus – taken in isolation (for absolute clarity, in separate consideration to*

associated loss of the heritage assets) no concerns are raised to this element of the scheme.”

Notwithstanding the objection raised by the BHO, it was noted that the demolition of The Coach House had already been accepted by the LPA, through application 213116, which was approved in 2021. The following extract from the Officer Report refers:

“The WBC Conservation Officer has indicated that, whilst the loss of the non-designated heritage asset is somewhat regrettable, in this instance given its demolition would facilitate a viable re-development of the site, it would be considered acceptable.”

This planning history had not been ignored by the BHO through their assessment of the current application, however, it was instead doubted whether the viable re-development of the site, as identified through application 213116, applied to the current scheme. The BHO stated the following: *“the recent planning history and established principle is recognised. It must, however, be noted this principle of demolition was accepted in relation to a different scheme, which allowed for different benefits.”*

Following a review of all the above, Officers have arrived at a different view to that of the BHO and consider there to be insufficient grounds to withhold planning permission for the demolition of The Coach House, especially where the principle of demolition has already been accepted. Furthermore, where the BHO noted the different benefits of the previous scheme, this was not expanded upon. The current proposal continues to seek a viable re-development of the site through the relocation of The Coach House, creating a more desirable layout, and utilising the site to a greater effect. Accordingly, it is considered that the fundamental benefits of the scheme are no less than those identified under the approval of application 213116.

Following discussions between Planning Officers, the Agent, and the BHO, on the matters raised above, the BHO withdrew their objection to the development due to the reasons stated.

Landscape and Trees:

The site is located within Landscape Character Area ‘Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau’. The site is also within the ‘Remenham Hill Area of Special Character’, and Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape (see WBC Valued Landscape Assessments 2024).

The Landscape & Trees Officer echoes those identified characteristics discussed previously, noting that the setting is rural with trees and woodland within the immediate surroundings. Whilst the Officer does not raise concerns to the replacement dwelling itself, stating that it would be in keeping with the surrounding pattern of development, they do however object to its position in close proximity to the boundary hedge.

In this regard, a pragmatic approach is required. Whilst the hedge provides significant amenity value to the site, it is not protected by any preservation order, and there is nothing preventing its removal at the discretion of the landowners. Accordingly, withholding planning permission on the basis that the new build may result in localised harm to parts of the hedge, lacks sufficient justification.

Notwithstanding the above, the hedge is clearly shown on the proposed plans to be retained, such that its retention would be secured via condition in any case.

Further concern was raised by the Landscape & Trees Officer regarding the proposed layout of the site, questioning why The Coach House, which would be the smaller of the two dwellings on the site, had a larger garden. However, this is clearly a symptom of maintaining a sense of privacy between the two properties, and any measures to balance the garden space would require the proposed dwelling to be pushed further into the north of the site, which would have a much more considerable impact with regard to the pattern of development. As such, whilst it is acknowledged that the size of the gardens that serve the two dwellings appears disproportionate, it is not considered that this would result in adverse harm.

Ecology:

Following a careful review, WBC Ecology are satisfied that the survey methodology for the Coach House is adequate to conclude this building currently has negligible bat roosting potential. The Careful Work Practices avoidance measures, mitigation and species enhancements recommended in Section 6.3 of W6228_rep_ 19-02-25 final would be secured by planning condition.

An enhancement scheme including integral bat tubes or boxes such as the Schwegler 1FQ or 1WQ bat boxes on buildings around the site would also be secured via condition. Bat boxes should be installed as high as possible on the exterior walls, just under the eaves on a south or west facing elevation of the Coach House.

Further conditions recommended by the Ecologist seek to restrict permitted development rights on the site, and secure the submission and implementation of a lighting design strategy. Both these conditions are considered to be disproportionate to the scale of the proposed development and fail to pass the legal test for the imposition of planning conditions. As such, they have not been taken forward.

Biodiversity Net Gain

According to Section 5.2, 0.04 ha of Developed land: sealed surface habitat would be lost, and 0.8 ha of vegetated garden will be retained and 0.0421ha of vegetated garden created. The individual good condition oak tree is assessed as 0.22 units.

If the application is approved, to secure the proposed 29.66% on-site biodiversity net gain, a Biodiversity Gain condition and implementation of the gain plan would be included on the decision notice.

Great Crested Newts

The application site falls within an amber Impact Risk Zone for great crested newts, indicating an area of suitable habitat and potential great crested newt presence. Four ponds appear on OS mapping within 500m of the application site and three of these contain historic records of great crested newts, including the nearest pond located 60m

from the application site. There are nearby historic records of great crested newts to the north, west, and south of the application site, and no major barriers to dispersal.

The applicant has supplied an ecological report (Windrush Ecology, Preliminary Ecological Appraisal & Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment, February 2025). This report has determined that habitats within the site are of negligible value for great crested newts and that the species is therefore likely absent from the site. The report considers that the development will have no impact on great crested newts.

However, the report has not considered the historic records indicating a local population of great crested newts in close proximity to the site (within 60m) or the potential for the site to become more suitable as a result of construction activities. No recent pond surveys have been carried out to confirm or refute the historic records, so a precautionary principle should apply. While the site currently offers few opportunities for great crested newts, this could change if the garden is left unmanaged prior to commencement of development, or as a result of demolition and construction activities. For example, great crested newts could shelter within rubble piles or under building materials, or become trapped in open excavations. They are capable of crossing small areas of unsuitable habitat while traversing the landscape. This could result in individual great crested newts being harmed as a consequence of the development.

These risks are considered to be small and manageable via precautionary methods of working (without the need for a great crested newt licence). Site workers should be made aware of the potential risk and should implement appropriate avoidance measures. Therefore, it has been recommended that a Great Crested Newt Precautionary Working Methods Statement (GCNPWMS) is produced to safeguard individual great crested newts throughout the development. This should be written by a suitably qualified ecologist and submitted to the local planning authority for approval prior to commencement of development. This has been agreed to by the Agent for this application.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

The Highways Officer does not consider that the proposal would have a significant impact on the highway network.

The existing access onto Remenham Hill would be retained and this is considered acceptable. The driveway into the site will be improved and turning area provided to enable vehicles to enter and leave in a forward gear.

Two parking spaces are proposed for the replacement dwelling and three parking spaces retained for use by Five Horseshoes House. The level of parking meets WBC parking standards and is therefore considered acceptable.

EVC will be required for the replacement dwelling, in accordance with Building Regs Approved Doc S and the proposed layout would not prohibit this.

Secure and covered cycle storage does not appear to be indicated on the drawings. The Highways Officer has requested this to be provided for the replacement dwelling, however, this would require additional built form in the Green Belt, such that on

balance, the benefit of the cycle storage would be outweighed by its negative visual impact.

Flooding and Drainage:

The application site is located in Flood Zone 1 and the development is at low risk from surface water flooding according to the EA mapping. A condition requiring further details of the existing and proposed drainage regime has been suggested by the Drainage Officer. However, the LPA consider this condition to be too onerous when compared with the scale of the development, plus the fact the site would retain and in fact increase the amount of permeable land. As such, the condition is not necessary.

Conclusion:

For all the above, the proposal is acceptable, and the application is recommended for approval.

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, 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:	Approve
Date:	16 July 2025
Earliest date for decision:	24 April 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
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Date:	17.07.25
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