

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	250435
Site Address:	Land North of Church Lane, Church Lane, Three Mile Cross
Expiry Date:	8 August 2025
Site Visit Date:	13 September 2024
Proposal: Full application for the proposed 5-year extension of the temporary use of the land for works compound to support provision of essential utility and infrastructure across the region.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Overhead cables 15m buffer
Contaminated Land Consultation Zone
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Countryside
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone
Ground Water Zones
Nuclear Consultation Zone
Strategic Development Location
Tree Preservation Orders
Landscape Character Assessment Area
Land Terrier
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
Thames Basin Heaths SPA Mitigation Zones
Local Plan Update Submitted Sites

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 CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements 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
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

	TB04 – Development in vicinity of Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), Burghfield 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 DM9 - Protecting Health, Safety and Amenity DM10 - Flood Risk DM11 - Water Resources DM12 - Sustainable Transport Movements
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document South of M4 SDL SPD Shinfield Neighbourhood Plan

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
160671	Full planning application for the re-implementation of access to field with entrance palisade gates and two demountable bollards. (Retrospective)	Refused 08/06/2016
173046	Full application for the proposed erection of a 1.8m high green mesh fence and gates to existing field entrance, replacing existing palisade fence.	Approved 13/12/2017
193248	Full application for the proposed erection of a temporary compound to facilitate infrastructure works, including hardstanding, parking, fencing and gates, cabins and storage units. (Part retrospective)	Approved 26/05/2020
202107	Application for submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning consent 193248 dated 26/05/2020. Conditions - Condition 4 - Visibility Splays Condition 5 - Cycle Parking Condition 6 - Routing Condition 7 - Drainage	Split Decision 09/09/2020
202908	Application to remove condition 5 of planning consent 193248 for the proposed erection of a temporary compound to facilitate infrastructure works, including hardstanding, parking, fencing and gates, cabins and storage units (part retrospective). Condition 5 refers to the provision	Approved 24/12/2020

	of bicycle/motorcycle parking and the proposal is to remove this requirement.	
213260	Application to vary condition No 1 of planning consent 193248 for the Full application for the proposed erection of a temporary compound to facilitate infrastructure works, including hardstanding, parking, fencing and gates, cabins and storage units. (Part retrospective). Condition No1 refers to the temporary use period of 24 months and the variation is to extend the use period to 60 months.	Approved 10/05/2022
221727	Application for submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning consent 213260 dated 10/05/2022. Condition 9 AWE DEPZ - End User Emergency Plan.	Approved 15/08/2022
222623	Application to vary condition 2 of planning consent 193248 for the proposed erection of a temporary compound to facilitate infrastructure works, including hardstanding, parking, fencing and gates, cabins and storage units. (Part retrospective). Condition 2 refers to personal permission and the variation is to include Instalcom in the wording of the permission along with the original operators (part retrospective).	Approved 16/11/2022

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Property Services – No comments received
WBC Environmental Health – No objection subject to conditions
WBC Drainage – No objection subject to condition
WBC Highways – No objection subject to previous conditions being retained
WBC Growth & Delivery (Planning Policy) – No comments received
WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection subject to conditions
WBC Emergency Planning – No objection subject to conditions

External

Office for Nuclear Regulation – No comments received
West Berks Emergency Planning Officer – No comments received
AWE Burghfield – No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Shinfield Parish Council (SPC) objects to the continuation of extending a temporary planning permission for a site that was originally used for local works. If approval was given to the application, SPC would ask for a restriction on the movements of heavy vehicles through the weight restricted section of road.
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Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Addendum:

An addendum to the application was received on 22/07/2025 following a discussion between the case officer and the agent and applicant. The addendum clarifies that a reduced extension for a period of 5 years is now being sought as opposed to the original 8-year requested period. Additionally, the addendum has provided clarity on the submitted statement relating to the nature of the temporary permission, along with an assessment and evidence of alternative sites being considered, and justification and rationale as to why the application site is the only viable option.

Description of Development:

This application seeks permission to extend the temporary use of the works compound for a further 5 years. The 5-year extension would allow OCU to continue to support the delivery of electricity infrastructure projects across Wokingham and the wider region through the current RIIO-ED2 period. In addition, the extended period would allow OCU to deliver other critical utility workstreams, such as digital infrastructure under the Building Digital UK (BDUK) Department for Science Innovation and Technology Programme.

The requested 5-year extension would include a period to allow OCU to demobilise from the site, including the removal of all temporary structures and the hoarding, and returning the land to its original state.

Site Description:

The application site is located on the northern side of Church Lane, and it is located within designated countryside. The northern side of Church Lane is a visual characteristic of countryside with little form of development. Surrounding developments include a mix of residential and commercial properties on the southern side of Church Lane, along with The Six Bells Public House to the north-east and Reading Gospel Hall to the south-west. Due to the presence of mature vegetation along the street frontage, the wider surrounding area has a verdant and rural character.

The site forms a temporary compound that is occupied by OCU who are working to provide support to utility companies across the region. They specifically help Scottish and Southern Electricity (SSEN) to deliver on their statutory duties to undertake works as part of the RIIO-ED2 price control period (2023-2028), as defined by OFGEM. The site functions as a hub for deliveries and the transport of materials necessary to support the upgrade works locally. The application site is used to house temporary office space / welfare units and for the storage of non-hazardous materials for distribution to the surrounding construction sites.

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 outside of settlement limits and as such the development requires assessment against Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy. This is a restrictive policy designed to protect the separate identity of settlement limits and maintain the quality of the environment. CP11 states that development will not normally be permitted outside of development limits except where it meets certain exceptions, e.g. where it does not result in an inappropriate increase in scale, form or footprint of the original building. 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.

In considering the principle of development, it is also necessary to have regard to national policy which supports high-quality communications and energy infrastructure. Paragraph 119 of the NPPF confirms that *“advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being”* and requires planning decisions to positively support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including full fibre and next generation mobile technologies.

Paragraph 119 places a particular priority on full fibre connections to existing and new developments, where feasible. Although focused on electronic communications, these principles are directly applicable to enabling utility infrastructure, including electricity networks to ensure that delivery of essential clean energy and digital initiatives is facilitated in a manner that is efficient, well-designed and proportionate to demonstrated operational need.

The principle of a temporary compound at this location was established by the grant of permission 193248 and this was for a period of 2 years. Application 231260 was a variation application that was approved, and this extended the use period to a total of 5 years. Both permissions were granted approval on the basis of their temporary nature. The original permission, 193428, was a personal permission that allowed the permitted temporary use to be carried out by Southern Electric Power Distribution. However, application 222623 varied this to allow Instalcom Limited to occupy the compound. Instalcom Limited are a division of OCU.

The application site is located within the South of the M4 Strategic Development Location (SDL). This SDL is allocated under Core Strategy Policy CP19 for a development of up to 2,500 new homes and associated infrastructure, including extensive open space. The existing compound was granted temporary permission since it was considered that the development would facilitate essential local and regional electrical supply to be maintained and upgraded as part of the SDL development.

Whilst the principle of development was established in the previous permissions, permission was granted on the basis that the permissions were temporary. Any further temporary harm to the character and appearance of the site and surrounding countryside would still have to be balanced against the benefits of the proposal, i.e. its ability to facilitate the continued delivery of essential utilities infrastructure to support existing and future sustainable development.

Additionally, it should be noted that MHCLG Planning Practice Guidance states that:

“It will rarely be justifiable to grant a second temporary permission (except in cases where changing circumstances provide a clear rationale, such as temporary classrooms and other school facilities). Further permissions can normally be granted permanently or refused if there is clear justification for doing so. There is no presumption that a temporary grant of planning permission will then be granted permanently” (Paragraph: 014 Reference ID: 21a-014-20140306 - Revision date: 06 03 2014)

In this case, based on the site-specific circumstances and the information provided, the continued temporary use of the compound for OCU’s welfare, storage and logistics functions is consistent with the NPPF’s objective to support necessary national and regional infrastructure delivery in a sustainable way and is therefore acceptable in principle.

Character of the Area:

Core Strategy Policy CP3 states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character, together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users, including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life. Core Strategy Policy CP1 requires developments to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment. Core Strategy Policy CP11 considers development proposals outside development limits. It is a restrictive policy designed to protect the separate identity of settlement limits and maintain the quality of the environment. CP11 states that development will not normally be permitted outside of development limits except where it meets certain exceptions.

The on-site operational development to facilitate the proposed use includes portacabin style temporary structures for office/welfare use and storage containers and a mix of timber and Heras fencing. It also includes the majority of the site being surface of Type 1 MOT hardstanding, with a smaller section of an asphalt parking area close to the entrance for parking. These forms of development are not typical of the characteristics of the open countryside on the northern section of Church Lane and would normally be resisted. However, it is noted that this site is opposite the Pulleys Transport Yard.

It was identified in the original permission for the use of this site (193248) and the variation application to extend the use of the site (213260) that the temporary nature of the development would result in a short-term negative impact on the countryside. Initially, a further 8-year extension was sought as part of this application. However, it was deemed that this would be blurring the lines of a temporary permission, additionally, it would be hard to view what would have been a total of 13 years as a

‘short-term’ impact. Further to this, little to no justification was provided as to why the 8-year period was specifically required.

Following the submission of the addendum, this application is now seeking a further 5-year extension (as opposed to 8) on top of the 5 years that have already been granted by previous permissions. As part of the addendum, an assessment of alternative sites considered for the works compound has been provided along with justification and rationale for this site being the only viable option.

In terms of considering alternative sites that may be appropriate, OCU have proactively engaged with local and national property agents in order to identify alternative sites that meet their operational requirements. The responses received from this search identified 1 viable location within a 10-mile radius. This option was already under offer and close to finalising with lawyers. OCU are remaining actively engaged with the property agents who are to inform OCU if anything appropriate comes to market.

As part of the addendum, OCU have provided further justification for the use of the site as a works compound. The site at Shinfield holds a strategically advantageous position as it is at the centre of the operation work and range of projects that OCU work on. A number of these projects including telecom infrastructure, the VM02 scheme, and the BDUK workstream are within Wokingham and the surrounding areas which makes the site an ideal location. Additionally, the site is close to major transport routes, most notably the A33 and M4, and such connectivity enables the smooth and timely movement of personnel, materials and equipment, which only enhances efficiency. The continued use of the site is important to ensure the efficient and sustainable delivery of critical infrastructure projects across the region.

To ensure that there is no unacceptable harm to the Countryside character of the area, in line with Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy, a demobilisation plan has been submitted as part of the addendum. The demobilisation plan demonstrates that the site can be cleared over a period of 3-months and this includes a two-week period to reinstate the ground to its original condition. This supports the reason for approving the previous applications (193248 & 213260) as there would only be a short-term negative impact on the countryside, and therefore the proposal complies with Policy CP11. A condition is recommended to ensure that the demobilisation plan is adhered to.

MHCLG Planning Practice Guidance states that “it will rarely be justifiable to grant a secondary temporary permission (except in cases where changing circumstances provide a clear rationale...)”. Through the assessment and evidence of other sites, and rationale provided within the addendum, along with the demonstration that the site can be returned to its original state through a demobilisation plan, it is deemed that the granting of a further temporary permission is justified in this case.

Overall, it is deemed that the use of the site for a further five years would only have a limited impact on the countryside character of the area. The temporary nature of the compound, and the reinstatement of the original ground conditions will ensure that the impact on the character of the area can be found as acceptable in this case. The proposal, subject to the demobilisation at the end of the 5-year period, complies with Policies CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy aims to protect neighbouring amenity. Policy CC06 of the MDD seeks to ensure that proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed noise impacts to protect noise sensitive receptors.

The application site is located approximately 150m from the closest residential properties to the south-west. This is a sufficient distance which helps to avoid any concerns in relation to residential amenity impacts. Specifically in relation to potential noise impacts, officers commented on the original application (193248) that noise levels would be negligible and unlikely to be audible above background noise levels by the M4 to the north of the site. Potential noise levels from the site are therefore not deemed to impact neighbouring properties.

The site, which has been operating for 5 years, has not received any complaints of noise or emissions nuisance, and no neighbours have objected to the proposal. This further demonstrates that the site does not have any significant impact on neighbouring amenities. Overall, the proposed 5-year extension for the use of the land for a works compound would have no impact upon neighbouring amenities.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

WBC Highways has accepted the proposed use as a works compound for the previous consents 193248 and 213260. Highways have no concerns with regards to the proposed extension of time, subject to the previously agreed conditions being retained. These relate to retention of visibility splays, HGV routing and the approved site layout drawing (to ensure appropriate parking and turning area within the site).

Flooding and Drainage:

The proposed extension of the temporary use of the compound does not introduce any changes to the existing topography or land use. The proposed site layout drawing '172447_PLN_S1_20.1_A' indicates that there is storage of topsoil along the western boundary and this forms part of the overland flow route. This topsoil storage reflects a longstanding arrangement on the site, and the existing conditions are being maintained within the extended temporary use, and therefore no obstruction to the surface water flow path is introduced. Following the findings of the Flood Risk Assessment, the agent has confirmed that no topsoil is to be stored on this area moving forward. The Council's Drainage Officer has reviewed this situation, and they therefore have no objection to the extension of the temporary use subject to a condition ensuring that there shall be no storage of material within the surface flow route for the duration of the extension to ensure that displacement does not occur, which could lead to flooding on or off site.

Landscape and 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 and Policy TB21 requires consideration of the landscape character.

The Council's Landscape and Trees Officer has no objection on trees or landscaping grounds to the proposal for the extended use of the compound. However, they have stated that it is important that the land is restored to its early agricultural use.

The Landscape and Trees Officer has also identified that there is a need to include mitigation for a number of trees on the site boundaries, especially for trees T10, T11 and T14 where the compound has extended into the root protection areas of these trees and has had a significant impact. An Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) dated 27th January 2025 submitted with the application provides details of the mitigation required for these trees, which will need to be undertaken within 3 months following granting of permission for this extension of time for the current temporary use. A condition for an Arboricultural Method Statement is recommended in order for additional details to be provided as to how the mitigation specified within the AIA can be implemented on site.

Biodiversity Net Gain:

Biodiversity Net Gain is not required for developments that do not impact a priority habitat and impact less than 25 square metres of on-site habitat. Given that the proposal is to extend an existing use, and as no development is proposed, the requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain falls away in this case.

Atomic Weapons Location:

The application site is situated within the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) surrounding Burghfield Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE). Policy TB04 of the MDD allows development in the vicinity of the AWE but only where the increase in density can be safely accommodated and having regard to the needs of "Blue light" services and the emergency off-site plan for the Atomic Weapons Establishment site at Burghfield.

The Council's Emergency Planning Officer has identified that this is an existing site which already has an established end user emergency plan. The current end user emergency plan is to be reviewed as the current plan was last updated in 2022. The new version of the end user emergency plan should be more robust in order to reflect the proposed 5-year extension. A condition is recommended to ensure that the end user emergency plan is reviewed and updated appropriately.

It is also noted that the proposal will not increase the number of individuals in the area and this is welcomed.

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.

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.

RECOMMENDATION

Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	6 August 2025
Earliest date for decision:	3 April 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	06.08.25