

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	250702
Site Address:	19 Grovelands Road, Spencers Wood, Wokingham, RG7 1DP
Expiry Date:	21 May 2025
Site Visit Date:	7 May 2025
Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of new church building (Use Class F1), construction of front wall and gates along with associated landscaping and car parking following demolition of existing buildings.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Modest Development Location (Spencers Wood)
Nuclear Consultation Zone
Public Open Space
Landscape Character Assessment Area
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
Thames Basin Heaths SPA Mitigation Zones

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 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 CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking TB04 – Development in vicinity of Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), Burghfield TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and Waste	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation DM3 - Protection of Habitats and Species DM8 - Restoration of Minerals and Waste Developments DM9 - Protecting Health, Safety and Amenity

Plan (JMWP)	DM12 - Sustainable Transport Movements DM13 - High Quality Design of Minerals and Waste Development DM15 - Site History
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document A Vision for Our Villages: Ryeish Green, Spencers Wood, Three Mile Cross

PLANNING HISTORY		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
111166	Application for a certificate of lawful use as the principal depot in conjunction with a road marking business.	Approved 22/06/2011
241396	Full application for the proposed change of use from a depot to a place of worship.	Approved 13/08/2024

CONSULTATION RESPONSES
Internal
WBC Property Services – No comments received. WBC Environmental Health – No comments received. WBC Drainage – No objection subject to conditions. WBC Highways – No objection subject to conditions. WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection subject to conditions. WBC Public Rights Of Way – No comments received. WBC Emergency Planning – No objection subject to conditions. WBC Ecology – No objection subject to conditions.
External
Office for Nuclear Regulation – No objection subject to conditions. West Berks Emergency Planning Officer – No objection subject to conditions. AWE Burghfield – No comments received.

REPRESENTATIONS	
Parish/Town Council	Shinfield Parish Council supports this application.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	Four neighbours have commented on this application and their comments are summarised below: - The current building is run down, and the proposed new hall is an improvement with well thought out elevations. <i>Officer comments: This is noted.</i> - The entrance/foyer and off-street parking are to the rear which results in minimum impact on the neighbourhood. <i>Officer comments: This is noted.</i>

	- The application clearly addresses neighbours' concerns relating to landscaping and street scene as raised in the previous application. <i>Officer comments: This is noted.</i> - This is a residential road and large, noisy gatherings are simply and no go and unfair to residents. <i>Officer comments: The change of use to a place of worship has already been approved under the previous application 241396.</i> - There is reference to a work construction measure being applied, can we please see this and hours of build. <i>Officer comments: A condition requiring a construction method statement to be submitted is recommended. With regards to hours of work, these should not be at unsociable hours, and if they are, this should be reported to Environmental Health.</i> - Building trucks and equipment should be at the back of the site, as the building is near a dangerous blind corner. <i>Officer comments: A condition requiring a construction method statement is recommended to ensure construction is carried out with minimum impact on the highway.</i> - Security lights would shine through my house. <i>Officer comments: It is not anticipated that any external security lights would cause a disturbance to neighbouring properties. However, if any external lighting does cause an issue, this should be raised with Environmental Health.</i> One neighbour commented outside of the consultation period and raised the following points. - Low-cost single storey flats would be a better use of the plot. <i>Officer comments: Permission to use the site as a place of worship has already been granted under the previous permission 241396.</i> - We have two community buildings in Spencers Wood that are underutilised. <i>Officer comments: Not a material planning consideration.</i> - I see parking overflow into Grovelands Road on a sharp bend. <i>Officer comments: The Council's Highways Officer is satisfied that the parking area could also accommodate additional informal parking if necessary.</i>
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APPRAISAL

Site Description:

This site is located within the village of Spencers Wood and the surrounding area is predominantly residential. The application site features a detached building that from the front has the appearance of a residential bungalow. There is a large area of hardstanding to the rear of the building along with an open framed building and this was used for the parking of vehicles associated with the previous use of the depot/offices. There are gates to the northern side of the building limiting access to the rear and there is also an area of hardstanding to the front which has also been used for parking.

Description of Development:

This application seeks permission for the demolition of the existing buildings on site and the erection of a new church building along with associated new car parking and planting layout. Consent has already been granted for the use of the existing buildings as a place of worship under application 241396.

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.

In assessing the principle of the proposed development, it is necessary to consider both national and local planning policy in respect of community facilities. Paragraphs 93 and 94 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024) make clear that planning decisions should plan positively for the provision and use of community facilities (such as places of worship) to enhance the sustainability of communities and guard against their unnecessary loss. At the local level, Core Strategy Policy CP6 specifically supports proposals that will improve community health, education, cultural and social well-being, including the provision of community facilities. The MDD Local Plan Policy TB09 further safeguards existing community facilities and supports the delivery of new facilities where they are well located to serve the community and do not give rise to adverse impacts. In this context, the proposed replacement of the existing buildings with a purpose-built place of worship, together with associated landscaping and parking, is supported in principle as a means of enhancing community infrastructure in line with both the NPPF and the adopted Development Plan, subject to detailed assessment of site-specific impacts.

Location Within the DEPZ:

The Council's Emergency Planning Manager has provided the following response to this proposal:

The application site is situated within the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) surrounding Burghfield Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE). The DEPZ and Off-Site Emergency Plan is in place to protect individuals living, working and visiting within this boundary, as legislated by REPPiR 2019. Any increase in this population would have a detrimental impact on the Council's ability to implement the Off-Site Emergency Plan – and as such, could be contrary to the requirements of Policy TB04 of the MDD Local Plan and section 8 of the NPPF.

The principles of this development were already agreed and secured by planning conditions in application 241396. The only difference is that the capacity of the building has been increased. As they did in 241396, the applicant has argued that this revised capacity would still be a betterment compared to the previous use. They have again argued that the development will not introduce a new population into the DEPZ, as it the site will be serving an existing community.

I'm therefore comfortable with the changes outlined from 241396.

Whilst they have no objections, the Emergency Planning Manager has requested that the same conditions from application 241396 are applied to ensure that they are secured, but amended to reflect the difference in capacity between proposals.

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. Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy requires developments to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment.

The existing buildings on site would be demolished and a new church building erected. The proposed new church building measures 16.3m x 10.6m and has a maximum ridge height of 6.2 metres. The main building of the existing church has an approximate footprint of 11.6m x 9.1m and a maximum ridge height of 6.1 metres. However, blocks A, B, C and a container, as identified on the submitted existing plans and elevations (853-01), add to the existing footprint of development on site.

The proposed new building is located 8.4 metres from the boundary with the neighbouring property no. 23 and is 2.3 metres from the boundary that is adjacent to the access to Shinfield Cemetery. The adequate separation distances ensure that the proposed new church building would not result in a terracing impact upon the street scene. The neighbouring property no. 21 has a maximum ridge height of 7.25 metres and therefore the proposed ridge height of 6.2 metres would not be considered unacceptable in terms of the impact on the character of the area. The proposed new church building will be set back 8 metres from the road, and this is aligned with the neighbouring property no. 21 which is set back by 7.2 metres.

It is deemed that the proposed new church building would contribute positively to the character of the area and therefore the proposal complies with policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy.

New gates and a wall are proposed to secure the parking area to the rear of the proposed new building. The gates and wall have a maximum height of 1 metre, and the piers on either side of the gate measure to 1.35 metres. It is deemed that the proposed gates and wall would have an acceptable impact on the character of the area.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Core Strategy Policy CP3 states that development proposals should not result in a detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life.

Due to the appropriate separation distances to the neighbouring properties there are no concerns on neighbouring amenity grounds relating to the issues of overbearing or loss of light. Additionally, as the proposed building is single storey, there are no concerns relating to overlooking.

Three air conditioning units are proposed on the southern elevation. These are screened behind a 1.8m close boarded fence and the access to Shinfield cemetery lies between them and no. 17. Therefore, it is not considered that they will negatively impact upon neighbouring amenities.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Within the existing buildings on site, consent has already been granted for the use as a place of worship under the previous permission (241396). Where the capacity is being increased from 35 to 50 people, it is noted that there were no highways reasons for the restricted numbers in the first instance. Additionally, the parking layout to the rear of the site has been revised and an additional 3 formal parking spaces are to be provided, and the parking area could also accommodate further informal parking if necessary, and this is deemed to be acceptable.

Regarding the access, Highways have no objection to the proposed changes. An area of hardstanding is also retained at the front, and this could also provide spaces for informal parking if required. The Council's Highways Officer has advised that an appropriate Highways Agreement will be required for the stopping up and reinstatement of the existing access/crossover onto Grovelands Road.

Cycle parking has been indicated under the canopy of the main entrance and this is considered acceptable in this instance.

EV Charging Points have been indicated on the submitted plans, and further details of this will be secured as part of Building Regs Approved Document S.

To ensure that construction is carried out with minimum impact upon the public highway and road users, the Highways Officer has requested a condition requiring a

construction method statement to be submitted prior to the commencement of development on site. Accordingly, this condition is recommended.

Flooding and Drainage:

The Council's Drainage Officer was consulted on this application. They have identified that the site is within Flood Zone 1 and they have no objection to the principle of the development. However, as no drainage details for the development have been provided, they have recommended a condition requiring full details of the drainage system for the site to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Accordingly, this condition is recommended.

Landscape and Trees:

The Council's Landscape and Trees Officer was consulted on this application. As there are existing trees and hedges on the site, and structures to be demolished, they have requested a condition requiring an arboricultural method statement to be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority, so that the existing trees can be retained and protected during demolition and construction in accordance with policy CC03 of the Local Plan. Accordingly, this condition is attached.

The Landscape and Trees Officer has also requested landscape details to be conditioned; however, adequate detail has been provided on the submitted site plan and therefore it is not considered necessary or reasonable to attach a condition requiring the submission of a scheme of landscaping. Accordingly, this condition is not attached.

Ecology:

The Council's Ecology Officer agrees with the conclusion of the Preliminary Roost Assessment that a suitable mitigation strategy can be developed and that further compensation and working practices need to be secured. However, in the absence of the mitigation strategy and compensation proposed in outline the Ecology Officer is not satisfied that the proposal complies with Local Plan policies CP3, CP7 and TB23 or the NPPF. The application currently fails to demonstrate that there will be no negative impact on bats. Therefore, in order to mitigate the loss of the confirmed roost and multiple potential roosting features, the submission and approval of a mitigation strategy that includes all of the mitigation and compensation set out in section 4.8 to 4.13 of the Preliminary Roost Assessment should be secured by planning condition. The Ecology Officer advises that the mitigation strategy includes a pre-commencement survey, avoidance mitigation measures, soft demolition and detail of the works that need to be supervised by an ecologist. Accordingly, this condition is attached.

Conclusion:

The proposal seeks the demolition of the existing buildings and the erection of a new purpose-built church with associated parking and landscaping. The principle of development is acceptable within the settlement limits, and national and local policy provides clear support for the delivery and enhancement of community facilities such as places of worship. The scheme has been assessed against the relevant material

considerations, including the site's location within the DEPZ, the impact on the character of the area, neighbouring amenity, highways and parking provision, flooding and drainage, landscape, and ecology. Subject to the recommended conditions, these matters are either addressed satisfactorily or can be appropriately mitigated.

On this basis, the proposed development is considered to comply with the NPPF and the relevant policies of the Core Strategy and MDD Local Plan. The scheme represents an opportunity to deliver an improved community facility in an appropriate and sustainable location, without resulting in unacceptable harm to the local environment or residential amenity. Accordingly, the proposal is recommended for approval, subject to the conditions set out.

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:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	4 September 2025
Earliest date for decision:	16 April 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	05.09.25