

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	241905
Site Address:	Rehoboth, Forest Road, Binfield, Wokingham, RG40 5QY
Expiry Date:	21 January 2025
Site Visit Date:	15 December 2024
Proposal: Full application for the proposed siting of horse exerciser.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Water Utility Consultation Zones
Green Routes and Riverside Paths
Heathrow Aerodrome Consultation Zone
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Scale and Location of Development Proposals – **Countryside (CP11)**
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone – **Green, Amber and Red Risk Zones**
Ground Water Zones
Nuclear Consultation Zone – **Special Case Zone**
Landscape Character Assessment Area
Local Plan Update Submitted Sites
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
Thames Basin Heaths SPA Mitigation Zones
PRoW Within WB Consultation Zone
Green Routes and Riverside Paths Consultation Zone
Ordinary Watercourses Consultation Zone
Ancient Woodland Consultation Zone

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Design Guide
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP2 – Inclusive Communities CP3 – General Principles for Development CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity 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 CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character

	TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Other	National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Valued Landscape Topic Paper (2020) Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) (WBLCA)

PLANNING HISTORY

App No.	Description	Decision/Date
2011/1802	Erection of a facilities building (including stables), manege and associated works plus change of use of land for the keeping of horses and allotments.	Approved 6 October 2011
F/2012/0651	Erection of a facilities building, manege and associated works within land that originally formed part of Harps Farm, formation of new access and change of use of land for the keeping of horses and a kitchen garden.	Approved 23 August 2012
F/2014/2781	Retrospective variation to F/2012/0651 to allow for the retention of hay barn.	Approved 7 April 2015
152822	Solar panels to existing roof slope.	Approved 13 November 2015
162793	Variation to Conditions 2 (approved plans), 10 (external lighting), 18 (storage of waste) and 20 (use of stable building) of F/2012/0651 to allow for insertion of windows to building, extension of reception porch, erection of external lighting, erection of manure waste storage point, use of existing roof space for store room and office and use of tack room as staff room.	Approved 21 December 2016
170733	Full application for the proposed erection of an ancillary building to provide workshops and stores	Approved 3 August 2017
231595	Full application for the erection of a stable, formation of a bund, siting of 1no. shipping container, timber lean to building and cabin (Retrospective).	Refused 4 September 2023
232961	Full application for the erection of an isolation stable, storage containers and rest cabin (part retrospective).	Approved 25/01/2024
242570	Full application for the retrospective change of use of land for the temporary siting of a marquee between 31st March and 24th December in any calendar year.	Refused 04/12/2024

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Highways – No objections

WBC Landscape and Trees – No objections
 WBC Public Rights Of Way – No comments received
 WBC CIL – Development is not CIL liable
 WBC Ecology Newts – No objections
 WBC Ecology – No comments received

External

Ramblers Association – No comments received
 Open Spaces Society – No comments received
 South East Water – No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

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

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site known as 'Rehoboth' was previously part of Harps Farm and is now owned and run by a registered charity called Just Around the Corner (JAC) Ltd. The charity operates as a youth work charity who support vulnerable young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, primarily through equestrian activities.

Permission F/2012/0651 allowed a building complex which included a facilities building, menage, paddocks, formation of a new access, change of use of the land for the keeping of horses and a kitchen garden. Since then a hay barn (F/2014/2781) and an ancillary building to provide workshops (170733) have also been permitted on the site. Most recently, permission was given for the erection of an isolation stable, storage containers and rest cabin adjacent to the menage on site (reference 232961). These permissions are personal to JAC and various conditions required the development to be removed should the charity vacate the site.

Conditions were also included in all of the above permissions to prevent further development on this site without express permission, in order to *"avoid the spread of operational development on the site to both safeguard the rural character of the area and so as not to prejudice the possibility of future agricultural use on the open areas of the site"*.

The site is located within the designated Countryside. Additionally, the site is also within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 11 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland' of the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) (WBLCA) and the Billingsbear Valued Landscape as described in the Council's Valued Landscape Topic Paper (2020).

Proposal Description:

This application seeks approval for the proposed siting of a horse exerciser on the site, to be used in association with the charity's (Just Around the Corner Ltd) existing operations.

Principle of Development:

Policy Context:

Core Strategy 2010:

Policy CP2 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that address the requirements of:

- a) An ageing population, particularly in terms of housing, health and wellbeing;
- b) Children, young people and families, including the co-ordination of services to meet their needs;
- c) People with special needs, including those with a physical, sensory or learning disability or problems accessing services; and
- d) The specific identified needs of minority groups in the borough, including Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople and black and minority ethnic groups. Proposals for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople (including allocations in other Development Plan Documents) will demonstrate that:
 - i) The site is located either within or close to the development limits of a settlement in policy CP9 in order to maximise the possibilities for social inclusion and sustainable patterns of living; and
 - ii) The proposed site is not disproportionate to the scale of the existing settlement whether singly or cumulatively with any existing sites in the area.

The site lies within the Countryside as designated in the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy. Core Strategy policy CP11 states, in order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except in certain circumstances. These exceptions are:

- 1) It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and
- 2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and
- 3) It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement; or
- 4) In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building;
- 5) In the case of replacement dwellings the proposal must:
 - i) Bring about environmental improvements;
 - or ii) Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.

- 6) Essential community facilities cannot be accommodated within development limits or through the re-use/replacement of an existing building;
- 7) Affordable housing on rural exception sites in line with CP9.

Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDDLDP) 2014:

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.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

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.

Paragraph 88 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, beautiful new buildings;
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;
- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and
- d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship

Paragraph 89 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

Assessment:

The proposals involve development that would expand the equestrian facilities/amenities for the existing charity who support vulnerable young people. Policy CP2 of the Core Strategy supports development that addresses the requirement of children and young people and therefore the proposals accord with this policy.

The original scheme approved under F/2012/0651 comprised an 'equestrian and training facility with allotments for therapeutic activities and learning opportunities for vulnerable young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties'. Beyond its description as a charitable operation, the uses include horse care, stable management, craftwork, horticultural activities (in allotment gardens) and relevant administrative and staff operations to oversee the education of the students. The principle of the development was acceptable as it provided community facilities in a centralised location in accordance with part 6 of Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy, which permits 'essential community facilities that cannot be accommodated within development limits or through the re-use/replacement of an existing building'.

In this instance the proposals involve the further expansion of these activities within the existing site and therefore also subject to criteria 1-3 of Policy CP11.

With regards to criterion 1 of CP11, the proposals involve development that contributes to and promotes recreation in the countryside by reason of providing expanded equestrian facilities to support the site. Compliance with the criterion is therefore achieved.

With regards to criterion 2, the proposals involve a horse exerciser with a modest footprint that is sited within an existing paddock and immediately adjacent to the internal access road and the stables. The encroachment northwards into the paddock would also be much less significant than the existing menage and storage buildings to the north-west. Overall, the level of encroachment would be minor and acceptable. Compliance with criterion 2 is therefore achieved.

Criterion 3 requires development to be within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement. The proposals involve a new building so do not qualify to be assessed under this criteria. Policy CP11 requires compliance with all three of the above exceptions to be considered acceptable in principle. This is not achieved. How this policy conflict influences the determination of this application will be explained further in the 'Planning Balance' section below.

Character of the Area/Landscape Character:

Policy Context:

With regards to well-designed places, paragraph 135 of the NPPF states planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short
- b) term but over the lifetime of the development;
- c) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- d) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

Paragraph 187(a) of the NPPF requires planning policies and decisions should

contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.

Paragraph 187(b) of the NPPF requires that planning applications enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.

Policy CP11 supports development in the countryside only where it maintains the high quality of the rural environment. Policy CP1(1) similarly only supports development that maintains or enhances the high quality of the environment, with policy CP3 supporting development of an appropriate mass, layout, built form, height and character to the area CP3(a) and which makes a positive contribution to the sense of place contributes to the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings CP3(f).

Policy CC03 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan required development proposals to provide new or protect and enhance the Borough's Green Infrastructure networks, including the need to mitigate potential impacts of new development. The Countryside is identified as one of the Borough's Green Infrastructure networks.

Policy TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan states that proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues. Proposals should retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

The Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document provides further guidance for developers with general guidance that development should respond positively to its site and local context (G1) and respond positively to the local character of the area (G2).

The National Design Guide section B1, paragraph 67 also states that the built form of well-designed places should relate well to:

- the site, its context and the opportunities they present;
- the proposed identity and character for the development in the wider place;

Site Context:

The application site is within the Billingbear Valued Landscape, which is wholly within the landscape character area (LCA) 11 known as 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland'. The valued landscape takes and its demonstrable physical attributes which would take this site beyond "*mere countryside*" and should be considered as more important than Countryside falling outside of this Valued Landscape designation as stated in the in the Valued Landscapes Topic Paper (2020).

The valuable landscape characteristics of the LCA include;

- ***Characteristic mature in-field and roadside oaks in the open arable fields***

which provide a sense of place.

- **Wooded skyline** which provides a backdrop to the surrounding areas.
- **Strong rural character** of the rolling agricultural landscape with its subtle wooded ridges, large woodlands and sparse settlement which create a strong sense of place.
- **Remote quality** due to the scarcity of settlement and relative inaccessibility by footpath which results in a sense of tranquillity despite proximity to urban centres and motorways.
- **Distant framed views** over the surrounding landscape, including to Wokingham town and wooded horizons outside the borough which provides a sense of place and orientation.

The Landscape Strategy is to conserve and enhance the existing rural character. The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the characteristic wooded ridges and woodland, including ancient woodland. In particular, there are opportunities to restore coppice management and reinstate and repair key hedgerows with hedgerow standards.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern through controlling development.

Assessment:

As outlined above, the horse exerciser has a modest footprint and would be 4.3 metres tall. It would form a close spatial relationship with the adjacent stables and its appearance is in-keeping with the site's equestrian operations and its prevailing rural character.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the additional built form within the Billingbear Valued Landscape and Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland LCA cannot reasonably be seen as enhancing or protecting the landscape, the development proposed is rurally appropriate and causes negligible harm to the surrounding landscape due to its modest scale and appropriate siting adjacent to existing structures. WBC Landscape also have raised no objections on landscape character grounds.

Like all of the other buildings on the site, the horse exerciser would be used exclusively in association with the charity's operations. Permissions F/2014/2781 for the hay barn, 170733 for the ancillary building to provide workshops and 232961 for the isolation stable, storage containers and rest cabin are all subject to conditions that require the development to be personal to JAC and various conditions that require the development to be removed from the site should this community use cease.

For the sake of consistency, these conditions will also be applied for this permission.

Neighbouring Amenity:

The nearest residential property to the development is 64 metres to the south-west. There are therefore no adverse neighbouring amenity concerns.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

The horse exerciser would be used exclusively in association with the charity's existing operations and would not generate any additional vehicle movements. WBC Highways therefore raise no objections to the proposals.

Flooding and Drainage:

The application site is within Flood Zone 1 and the development's footprint is very modest. There are therefore no concerns on flood risk or surface water drainage grounds.

Arboricultural Matters:

There are no arboricultural concerns.

Ecology:

The application site is located within Green, Amber and Red Risk Zones for Great Crested Newts. Despite this, WBC Ecology Newts have raised no objections to the proposals as the development's footprint would have a negligible impact on this protected species.

Biodiversity Net Gain:

As of 2nd April 2024, a 10% Biodiversity net gain (BNG) for minor developments is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Environment Act 2021). This can be achieved through either on-site or off-site mitigation.

Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, subject to some exceptions, every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition that the biodiversity gain objective is met ("the biodiversity gain condition").

The biodiversity gain condition is a pre-commencement condition: once planning permission has been granted, a Biodiversity Gain Plan must be submitted and approved by the planning authority before commencement of the development.

The BNG metric provided with this application outlines that a 58.75% gain in units can be achieved to the north of the site, the details of which will be secured within the Biodiversity Gain Plan.

Planning Balance:

The need to expand and develop the charity's operations to further assist their work with young vulnerable people is acknowledged and is afforded notable weight in the planning balance.

A conflict with Policy CP11 has been identified due to the fact the proposals involve the erection of a new building. Despite this, its harm on the character of the area and surrounding countryside is negligible and there are no other identified conflicts with

any other material considerations.

In light of the above and weighing this conflict against the benefits of the scheme, it is considered the scheme is in accordance with planning policy and 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:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approval
Date:	8 January 2025
Earliest date for decision:	18 December 2024

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	10.01.25