

PLANNING REF: 261695

PROPERTY ADDRESS: address in Wescott Ward, RG40

SUBMITTED BY: Maria Gee

DATE SUBMITTED: 10/08/2026

COMMENTS:

Proposal

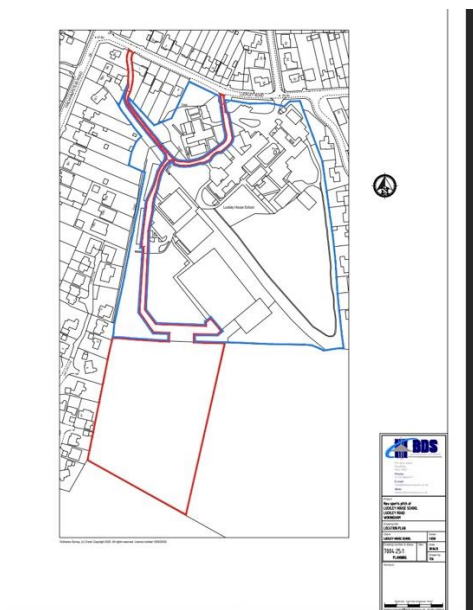
This application proposes a redevelopment of a field at the southern end of the curtilage of Luckley House School (but outside the existing curtilage) with two new rugby pitches, a cricket pitch and an athletics track on the site.

Planning history

Unfortunately, the applicant has not included previous applications and their outcome in their application.

This area was part of PA170261 (which included housing); that application was refused. This area was also part of a planning appeal in relation to PA190286. The planning appeal reference is APP/X0360/W/19/3235572 Land East of Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, RG40 3JT. That application was made in outline and included housing, but with full details in relation to access, layout, scale, appearance and landscaping to be considered at a later date as reserved matters (see appeal, para 7). The planning appeal by the developer was dismissed on several grounds by the inspector.

The location that was rejected in 190286 is shown in the left figure below, with the current application (right figure below) for comparison. The location in the original refused application and dismissed appeal includes the location in this application PA261695.



Relevant factors from the planning appeal

The planning inspector for PA190286 highlighted the following issues that are applicable here (references are to the appeal decision notice for PA190286):

23. the [location] is...outside of any settlement boundary...It is clear...that there are several underlying reasons for seeking to limit development to within settlement boundaries. These include: the protection of the countryside; protecting the separate identities of settlements.

36. The...site is located adjacent to the settlement boundary of Wokingham and therefore, in policy terms, it is within the open countryside.

38. ...It is, in my view, a clear transition point between the urban edge of Wokingham and open countryside to the south and east. The site therefore forms part of the rural setting of Wokingham.

42. ...The proposal would only be visible from residential properties that are adjacent to the appeal site on...Hart Dyke Close. There will undoubtedly be visual impacts on these receptors whose views of the open and rural appeal site with further countryside beyond would be replaced by a significant level of built development.

44. Turning to the properties on Hart Dyke Close, there are numerous properties who have close range views over the...site, with some having fairly open boundaries and clear views. On this basis, I consider that the visual impact on these properties would be major adverse in significance.

59. The scheme would result in harm to the landscape, including the rural setting of Wokingham and would result in numerous visual impacts, some of which would be moderate and major adverse...Overall, I consider that there would be a moderate level of harm caused to the character and appearance of the area.

There is a difference between PA190286 and the current application, which is that there is no housing in PA261695. However, the current application is still in an area designated as countryside, that delineates settlement boundaries and that has significant adverse visual impact on properties in Hart Dyke Close because of the inclusion of a 3.5m high acoustic screen immediately adjacent those properties.

The application seeks to justify the development despite being in countryside and outside settlement boundaries and I will return to those justifications later. They are not compelling. The issue with encroaching on the countryside is that it sets a dangerous precedent for development of the remainder of the site and the settlement gap.

Noise impacts and mitigation

The noise impact assessment (NIA) (section 6) states that “to control noise, a barrier will need to be introduced at the eastern end of the rugby pitches between the pitches themselves and the rear of the noise sensitive receivers [Hart Dyke Close] in line with the “ball stop netting” on the proposed site layout drawings. This should be a 3.5metre high screen, formed of a continuous and imperforate material with a minimum mass per unit area of 15kg/m². The recommended location for such a screen is indicated on the attached site plan.”

The materials to be used in the construction of the acoustic panels are not stated and the construction of the panels is not addressed in the application.

In front of this screen is also 6.5m high ball stop netting.

This NIA, at section 8.2 also states that “the context of the area is one in which sports fields form a part of the established character, due to existing football and hockey pitches in the vicinity of the newly proposed facilities.”

I dispute this notion of context. The proposed site is clearly separate from the current school site (outside the existing curtilage) and forms a new sports site, with completely different noise impact considerations.

The noise management plan, in essence, amounts to having *stern words* with those making the noise, as stated in section 9, with the notions that a noise management plan ‘could’ be ‘refined and adopted’. There are also several iterations of ‘should’ (not must). The noise management plan is not binding and, as yet, does not exist. Raising an issue does not imply resolving an issue. Excerpts below (*italics added*):

- “Staff, Students and Spectators *should be reminded of the proximity to residents* through the use of signs and information when using the facilities.”
- “the use of the facilities *should* be subject to reasonable and responsible behaviour. This *should* include keeping shouting to a minimum and a zero tolerance policy for bad language.”
- “If students/staff/spectators were to continually disregard these policies, the school *will raise this issue with the person/people in question.*”

Effect on wildlife

The field visit for the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) was made during the day in July and no bat detection equipment appears to have been used. As such, its scope is limited. Nearby properties have been required to have bat surveys and one should be required for this application.

The likelihood of an offence with respect to nearby great crested newt colonies is assessed as amber (offence likely). The applicant has not responded to this assessment.

No assessment has been made in the PEA of the effects of the 3.5m acoustic screening on bat commuting or foraging routes, nor on nocturnal birds. Indeed, the 3.5m high acoustic fence is not marked on the plan included in the PEA.

The effect of the 6.5 netting on bird entanglement is mentioned, but the applicant had not responded by proposing a change in design of the netting, which is adjacent TPO trees that are likely wildlife rich.

The risk of harming reptiles (such as slowworm and grass snake) that could cross the site has not been addressed by the applicant.

The above should be addressed by (a) requiring a bat survey and (b) conditions in any planning approval.

Effects on trees

The canopy heights and spread of the protected trees along the western border of the site and the root protection areas (RPA) based on the diameter of the protected trees (BS 5837:2012) are not shown on the plans included in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA). Since the acoustic screening is not addressed in the report, there is insufficient detail to judge the adverse effect on protected trees.

The AIA does not specify the distance between the acoustic screen and any RPAs. It does not take into account the sunlight shading and rain shadow caused by the 3.5m noise screen. This affects four trees that have TPOs (TPO references T25, T26, T27, T28). The AIA does not consider the impacts on RPAs of installing or managing the 3.5m acoustic screen which, without foundations, acts as a really big sail.

Indeed, the 2m fencing is mentioned in the report, but the 3.5m acoustic screening is not. The report has this to say about the 2m fencing:

“A secure boundary fence, a 2-metre tall, welded mesh fence, will be erected around the site perimeter. A detailed specification has not been received at this stage, but where excavation will be needed within the RPA of retained trees for post foundations, appropriate mitigation measures must be followed.”

No such assessment or mitigation measures have been included in the application. The fence posts for a 3.5m high screen, with a much higher density than mesh screening will need to be much more extensive due to significantly higher wind resistance.

The application should not be approved without the above matters being addressed.

Design and access statement

The design and access statement (DAS) seeks to justify the development but fails to be compelling.

The DAS states that ‘the general open character of the site and wider landscape would...be retained’ and “the proposals include acoustic fencing to the west of the proposed pitches in accordance with the recommendations set out in the accompanying noise impact assessment. This fence is kept away from the boundary with the adjoining houses and is of sufficient distance to ensure no intrusive effect upon their outlook.”

The 3.5m acoustic screening does not allow for an ‘open character’. The distance of the screening to the adjacent houses is not specified, nor the materials, nor are there any visualisations of the screens from the housing. Unless it can be demonstrated that it is far enough away not to warrant one (and I cannot tell due to lack of distances on the plans) there should be a daylight and sunlight assessment for this structure.

Part of the justification for this development is that “the activities by the school would be daytime only within their normal school hours and reasonable after-school club times” and “while the primary purpose of the field is to meet the needs of the school, they see that it may create opportunities for wider community benefit through organised partnerships in the daytime, outside school hours.” Furthermore, “whilst the proposals are primarily aimed at improving the sporting facilities of the school, they also have potential for hire to local clubs outside of school hours, thereby offering a benefit to the wider community.”

There is little opportunity for increased partnership if the activities are restricted to daylight hours. During the winter, early spring and late autumn there will be no daylight hours after school time, which runs from 8.45 to 16.00 with pastoral time extending the day to 17.30. The school is closed in the summer for most school years during July and August. Weekends are a possibility, although this will adversely affect the amenity of residents adjacent the site (see above for noise impact).

The following is stated regarding highways: “Highways matters aren’t considered relevant. All existing parking is retained, there is no change to the parking provision

at the site for all vehicle types, and the proposals don't serve to increase the capacity of the school giving rise to the need to provide additional parking".

This does rather suggest very limited engagement with the community using the additional facilities because extensive use would result in additional highways load.

With respect to community use, the application does not mention the proposed Wokingham Southern Development Location (SDL) sports hub, shown here:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/news/2025/new-outdoor-sports-hub-vision-now-taking-shape> and

<https://wokingham.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s81490/Appendix%20A%20-%20Grays%20Farm%20Sports%20Hub%20-%20OS%20CC%2004.11.25.pdf>

This provides for a pavilion, football pitches, hireable events space, an 80-station gym, a studio space, and a soft play room and the council notes that "There are very modest current shortfalls in cricket, rugby and hockey that can be addressed through quality improvements to existing pitches and/or new facilities within the existing SDLs."

The new sports hub is less than one mile (currently about 1km walking or cycling) from Luckley School and will be walkable or cyclable from most of the new housing and from parts of the town centre. The attractiveness and sustainability of this new hub, taken together with the less than strong link to 'community benefit' in the application, advances no compelling argument for the proposed application encroaching on countryside.