

PLANNING REF : 262274
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Pitts Lane
:
: RG6 1DD
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Dave Sturgess
DATE SUBMITTED : 06/10/2026

COMMENTS:

I wish to strongly object to planning application 262274 for the proposed data centre at Thames Valley Park.

I recognise that the site is an existing commercial site and that the existing office buildings may reasonably require redevelopment. However, replacing them with a 72MW data centre and associated energy infrastructure represents a very substantial change in the scale, intensity and environmental impact of the site. I believe the application has not demonstrated that this particular development is appropriate for this location.

1. Excessive scale and visual impact

The proposal would provide approximately 37,000 square metres of data-centre floorspace, with buildings and associated plant potentially reaching around 30.5 metres in height. This is a very substantial structure in an area whose character is closely associated with landscaped business-park buildings and the surrounding Thames Valley landscape.

The combination of large data halls, plant, flues, backup generation equipment and associated infrastructure risks creating an industrial-scale development rather than a conventional business-park building.

I ask the Council to give particular weight to the visual impact from surrounding areas, public rights of way and the Thames Valley Park environment, and not simply assess the proposal against the existing office buildings.

2. Natural-gas generation is unacceptable for a new development of this scale

One of my principal objections is the proposed use of natural gas fuel cells to provide a substantial proportion of the site's electricity requirements during the initial phase.

The energy strategy indicates that the completed development could require approximately 110MW of electricity, while the site currently has only around 1.8MW of grid capacity available. The proposal therefore relies on on-site generation, with natural-gas fuel cells proposed during the initial period while further grid capacity is secured.

I do not consider it satisfactory for a major new development being proposed in 2026 to depend on fossil-fuel generation for many years. The later availability of a larger grid connection is not sufficiently certain to justify treating the gas generation as merely a short-term issue.

The Council should require clear, enforceable commitments concerning the duration of gas generation, the maximum emissions associated

with it, and the circumstances in which it will cease. A future intention to transition away from gas should not be treated as equivalent to a guaranteed commitment.

3. Carbon emissions and climate impact

The Council should consider the full carbon consequences of the development, including:

- * embodied carbon from demolishing the existing buildings; *
- construction of approximately 37,000 m² of new floorspace;
- * the energy required to operate a 24-hour data centre;

- * emissions associated with natural-gas fuel cells;
- * backup generation;
- * construction and replacement of substantial mechanical and electrical infrastructure.

The fact that the data centre may eventually obtain more electricity from the grid does not remove the carbon impact of constructing and operating such a large energy-intensive facility.

I ask the Council to require a clear whole-life carbon assessment and enforceable carbon-reduction measures before granting permission.

4. Noise and 24-hour operation

A data centre is fundamentally different from the existing office use because it operates continuously, 24 hours a day, with cooling, mechanical plant, generators and other equipment potentially operating throughout the night.

The proposal includes substantial mechanical and electrical plant and backup generation. Even if individual pieces of equipment comply with technical noise limits, the cumulative effect of continuous plant noise should be assessed carefully, particularly during quiet nighttime periods.

I am concerned about the potential for low-frequency and tonal noise from cooling and electrical equipment, as well as noise from emergency generators and other plant.

The Council should not rely solely on daytime noise measurements. A robust assessment of nighttime background noise and cumulative operational noise is required, together with enforceable limits at the nearest residential properties.

5. Impact on Thames Valley Park's ecological setting

The site is immediately associated with the wider Thames Valley Park environment and is close to wetland and nature-reserve habitats.

The Council should take particular care to ensure that lighting, noise, construction activity, drainage, surface-water runoff and air emissions do not adversely affect wildlife.

A claimed biodiversity net gain should not be treated as

automatically overcoming the site's ecological sensitivities. The quality, location and long-term management of proposed habitat improvements are important, not simply the percentage figure.

I would ask the Council to ensure that any biodiversity measures are genuinely additional, locally appropriate and secured for the long term.

6. Construction disruption

The proposed construction programme is substantial, with demolition followed by several years of construction and fit-out. This is not a minor redevelopment.

There is potential for prolonged disruption from heavy construction vehicles, deliveries, demolition, piling, cranes, dust, noise and construction traffic.

The Council should require a detailed Construction Environmental Management Plan, including strict controls on:

- * construction hours;
- * heavy vehicle routing;
- * delivery times;
- * dust and air-quality monitoring;

- * demolition methods;
- * noise and vibration;
- * protection of nearby habitats and waterways;
- * construction-worker parking;
- * emergency arrangements.

These controls should be conditions of any permission rather than matters left to informal agreement.

7. The claimed traffic reduction should not obscure the change in character of the site

I note that the applicant predicts fewer vehicle movements than the previous office use. However, this comparison should not be treated as sufficient justification for the proposal.

A reduction in ordinary commuting traffic does not eliminate the need to consider the different nature of data-centre traffic, including construction traffic, servicing, maintenance, fuel-related movements and deliveries associated with a large critical-infrastructure facility.

The Council should independently scrutinise the applicant's traffic assumptions rather than assuming that fewer daily vehicle movements automatically means there is no transport impact.

8. Uncertainty created by the outline nature of the application

This is an outline application in which matters other than access are reserved. That is particularly significant for a development where the final appearance, layout, landscaping and detailed plant

arrangements could have a major bearing on its impact.

I therefore believe the Council should be cautious about granting a broad outline permission where important details affecting residents and the environment remain unresolved.

Any permission should establish genuinely robust parameters for height, massing, plant, noise, lighting, emissions, landscaping and environmental protection rather than allowing these matters to be substantially determined at a later stage.

9. Questionable balance between local impacts and local benefits

The permanent employment benefit appears relatively modest compared with the exceptional scale of the development. The application anticipates approximately 40-65 direct operational jobs once the data centre is running.

The Council should therefore carefully consider whether the permanent local economic benefits justify the scale of the environmental and infrastructure impacts, rather than placing disproportionate weight on the economic benefits of the construction period.

Conclusion

I do not object simply because the proposal is a data centre. My objection is to the scale, energy requirements and environmental consequences of this particular proposal at this particular location.

A development requiring up to approximately 110MW of electricity, incorporating substantial on-site natural-gas generation, large-scale mechanical plant and buildings up to approximately 30.5 metres high represents a fundamental change to the character and intensity of this part of Thames Valley Park.

In my view, the applicant has not demonstrated that the impacts on climate, residential amenity, noise, air quality, landscape, ecology and infrastructure are acceptable or that sufficient safeguards are in place.

I therefore ask Wokingham Borough Council to refuse application 262274.

Alternatively, if the Council is minded to approve the application, I ask that no permission be granted unless stringent, enforceable conditions are imposed covering the duration and emissions of gas generation, operational and nighttime noise, air quality, lighting, ecological protection, drainage, construction traffic, construction hours, landscaping, building height and the detailed design of all plant and energy infrastructure.