

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	251385
Site Address:	Land Adjacent To Phoenix Park Nelson's Lane Reading RG10 0RR
Expiry Date:	17 October 2025
Site Visit Date:	8 July 2025
Proposal: Full application for erection of 2 no. masts with receiver antennae and associated infrastructure, parking and landscaping (temporary development).	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

Countryside
Overhead Cables 15 metre buffer zone
Amber Risk Zone for Great Crested Newts
Archaeological Sites Consultation Zone
Contaminated Land Consultation Zone

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 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 CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets TB25 – Archaeology TB26 – Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character
Wokingham Borough	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside

Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS14 – Sites allocated for residential development, including residential as part of mixed use development SS15 – Securing infrastructure SS16 – Safeguarded routes SS17 – Transport improvements CE1 – Design principles for efficient buildings CE2 – Environmental standards for non-residential development CE4 – Supporting a circular economy C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging C7 – Digital infrastructure and communications technology C8 – Utilities ER3 – Supporting the rural economy FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage FD3 – River corridors and watercourses NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design NE6 – Valued landscapes DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity DH5 – The historic environment DH6 – Archaeology HC5 – Environmental protection HC6 – Air pollution and air quality HC8 – Noise pollution HC9 – Contaminated land and water
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document A Design for Hurst

PLANNING HISTORY

Pheonix Park has a relatively extensive planning history, however none of it is considered relevant to the development proposals.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Property Services – No comments received
WBC Environmental Health – No objections
WBC Drainage – No objections
WBC Highways – No objections
WBC Growth & Delivery (Planning Policy) – No comments received
WBC Economic Prosperity & Place (Community Infrastructure) – No comments

received
WBC Green Infrastructure – No objections
WBC Landscape and Trees - Objections
WBC Health and Wellbeing – No comments received
WBC Public Rights Of Way – No objections
WBC Community Safety – No comments received
WBC Emergency Planning – No comments received
WBC Built Heritage Officer – No objections
WBC CIL – No comments received
WBC Ecology Newts – No objection subject to conditions
WBC Sustainability – No comments received
WBC Ecology – No comments received
WBC Sports Development (Places and Neighbourhoods) – No comments received

External

Office for Nuclear Regulation – No comment
Natural England – No comment
Southern Gas Networks – No comments received
Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments received
The Environment Agency – No objection subject to condition(s)
Berkshire Archaeology – No objections
West Berks Emergency Planning Officer – No comments received
Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue – General fire safety advice
Active Travel England – No comment
BOB ICB NHS Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West – No comments received
AWE Burghfield – No comment
London Gatwick Airport – No objections
Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust – No comments received
HSE Fire Safety – No comments received
Crime Prevention Design Advisor – Advice on no-climb fencing
SSE Power Distribution – No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	The Parish Council wishes to OBJECT to this application on the following grounds. The fundamental issue with this application is the visual impact of the masts on the local environment. Whilst it is acknowledged that the application is for temporary use - 5 years, the impact during this period would be significant. These masts would be a dominant feature around Nelsons Land and Pound Lane and the immediate areas. The masts would be visible from Church Hill, an area of special character, and around the southern area of the parish and change the rural outlook. The masts would not bring any economic benefit to the
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	parish and would materially change the appearance of the area. There are no masts in the and around the area of a similar size.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	One objection on the following grounds: - Visual Impact and Character of the Area - Proximity to Residential Areas and Public Spaces - Environmental and Ecological Concerns - Alternative Site Considerations - Safety Concerns for neighbouring properties in terms of fire risk or impacts on electricity supplies (Officer comment: Fire risks are covered by Building Regulations and is not a planning matter, neither is the potential supply of electricity in the area.) - Impacts on value of properties (Officer comment: This is not a material planning consideration.)

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site consists of 0.38ha to the rear of Pheonix Park Industrial Estate on Nelsons Lane, Hurst. It is comprised of a mix of both open grassland and existing hardstanding to the rear of the estate, adjacent to an existing open-ended barn building currently in use for storage.

The site is located within the designated Countryside within the predominantly flat landscape of Hurst. Beyond the immediate open farmland/paddocks is a wider landscape of similar character with dispersed clusters of residential properties and buildings serving agricultural and equestrian land usage.

The nearest residential properties (Knowlands, Nicholas House and Grange Farm Bungalow) are on Nelson's Lane approximately 100 metres from the site to the south-east and to the north. Grange Farm, a rural commercial business park, is to the south-east on the opposite side of Nelson's Lane.

Wokingham Road Area of Special Character is between the Site and Hurst Conservation Area, approximately 500 metres from the site. The Local Historic Parks and Gardens of Haineshill, Hurst Lodge, Bill Hill Park and Billingbear are all between 1km and 2km from the site. The closest Listed Building is 'Heriots' (Grade II Listed), located approximately 300 metres west of the application site.

Public Rights of Way (PROWs) in close proximity to the site consist of STNH13 (adjacent to Grange Farm), STNH11 (adjacent to Bridleway Farm) and STNH14 (east of Wokingham Road).

There is existing pylon infrastructure present on and adjacent to the site, consisting of several electricity pylons.

Proposal Description:

This application seeks approval for the proposed erection of 2 no. telecommunication masts with receiver antennae and associated infrastructure. The permission sought is for a 5-year temporary period.

One mast will be located to the rear of the existing barns on scrubland in the western corner of the site. The other will be to the north-east, on what is currently the western corner of an open agricultural field. Each mast will be approximately 51.2 metres high. Antennae will be fixed to both masts at heights of 30 metres and 50 metres, as well as two microwave dishes up to 600mm in diameter fixed at 48 metres.

The masts will be latticed, tapering from a width of approximately 3 metres at the base, to approximately 1.1 metres at the top. Each mast will be within an 8 metre x 8 metre enclosure surrounded by a 2.4 metre high paladin security fence.

Two single-storey cabins are to be positioned against the rear wall of one of the barns; a 2.4 metre x 6.1 metre shipping container used for storage and a 3 metre x 4.9 metre prefabricated operations cabin.

A timber lean-to structure with a corrugated sheet roof will cover the operations cabin, at the opposite end of the barn to an existing lean-to structure. The cabins will be within a compound surrounded by a 2.4 metre high paladin security fence. The compound and new access and the parking area in front of it will be surfaced in a permeable shingle.

The development would be for the exclusive use of a company called Ratesu. The masts are a new form of advanced communications system supporting international communications involved in the global financial markets. The system is required to communicate with the target data centre in Slough.

Specifically, the planning statement outlines that this development is for a High Frequency (HF) intercontinental radio communication system which provides vital communications technology for the financial sector and trading in the City of London, helping to keep it at the forefront of global trading.

Principle of Development:**Wokingham Development Plan:**

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. This criteria is as follows:

- 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.

Local Plan Update (LPU):

The Council are also progressing with their Local Plan Update (LPU) which has progressed beyond the Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19) stage, with representations received on the plan's legal compliance and soundness between 30 September and 13 November 2024.

The Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19) consultation has now closed, and the Council have now analysed the representations received. The Regulation 22 plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination in February 2025, and two Planning Inspectors have been appointed to examine (EiP) the plan. The examination of the local plan is ongoing, and the council responded to initial questions and requests from the Inspectors in May 2025.

As seen in High Court judgements, even when an emerging plan is at an advanced stage, it may still attract limited weight if further consultation and modifications are required, and the Inspector has yet to issue a final report. Wokingham's LPU has several stages yet to be completed, including the examination hearings and main modifications stages, which restricts the weight that can currently be afforded to non-substantive.

Principle policies considered most relevant to the development proposals are as follows:

SS5 – Development in the countryside:

Policy SS5's subtext states that it may be necessary to locate essential infrastructure and utilities in the countryside. This may relate to provisions of statutory undertakers such as water supply, wastewater, electricity, **telecommunications infrastructure**, and transportation improvements. Where proposals are proposed in the countryside, they must be designed to minimise any harm to the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

C7 – Digital infrastructure and communications technology:

Policy C7 states that the roll out and continued improvement of digital infrastructure and communications technology will be supported, including full-fibre gigabit-capable broadband, 4G and 5G technologies. Development proposals for digital infrastructure or communications technology will be supported where they:

- a) Minimise adverse impacts on local character, amenity, heritage assets, the quality of the public realm or pedestrian / highway safety;

- b) Explore innovative design and technology solutions, such as concealment/camouflage options, to minimise visual impact;
- c) Explore opportunities to make the most efficient use of existing telecommunication sites, such as mast sharing or use of existing buildings or structures; and
- d) Demonstrate no preferable alternative sites are potentially available which would result in a development that would be less visually intrusive.

The Council however acknowledge that there are unresolved objections on substantive grounds pursuant on the majority of relevant conditions listed above, meaning weight attracted to these policies is limited.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024):

Paragraph 85 notes that planning decisions should help create conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

Paragraph 87 sets out that planning decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors, including making provision for data driven, creative or high technology industries.

Paragraph 119 states that ‘Advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being’. It goes on to explain that planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks.

Paragraph 120 continues by stating that the number of radio and electronic communications masts and the sites for such installations should be kept to a minimum consistent with the needs of consumers, the effective operation of the network and providing reasonable capacity for future expansion. Where new sites are required, equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.

Paragraph 122 sets out that applications for electronic communications development should be supported by necessary evidence to justify the proposed development, including:

- c) For a new mast or base station, evidence that the applicant has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure and a statement that self-certifies that, when operational, International Commission guidelines will be met.

Paragraph 123 identifies that local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only and should not seek to prevent competition between different operators or question the need for an electronic communications system.

Paragraph 131 notes that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and helps make development acceptable to communities. Paragraph 135 sets out

that planning decisions should ensure developments will function well and are sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding landscape setting.

Assessment:

Attention first turns to Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy, which in the case of the development proposals, requires compliance with the first three criteria to be considered acceptable in principle.

Criterion 1 requires proposals to contribute to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough. Whilst it is acknowledged that the development is for an established business that would contribute to the UK economy, it is for an established business in Slough, not an enterprise within the Wokingham countryside. Consequential investment into the Pheonix Park estate cannot reasonably be considered to comply with this requirement either. Therefore, the development fails to comply with criterion 1.

With regards to criterion 2, whilst the masts would lie within close proximity to existing built structures at Pheonix Park, their 51.2 metre heights would be visually intrusive on the surrounding landscape and taller than the nearby pylons, with views of their form available from multiple viewpoints in the surrounding countryside. That said, the antennas at the apex of the masts would be very thin (maximum 64mm) and largely illegible from any views that aren't within immediate proximity to the masts. The main massing comes from the latticed structure, which only reaches a maximum width of 3 metres. The 'lightweight' appearance of the structures does assist in assimilating the development into the surrounding landscape, but the vertical encroachment of development is considered excessive in the local rural context of the area, to the detriment of its openness.

It is acknowledged the development would only be in place temporarily for a period of 5 years. Whilst the vertical massing of the masts would cause harm to the openness of the Countryside, this would be limited by its temporary nature and would not be permanent. Notwithstanding this, compliance criterion 2 is not achieved but the weight afforded to this conflict is moderate.

Criterion 3 of CP11 is not considered relevant to the development proposals.

Overall, the development is unacceptable in principle as per Policy CP11. This policy conflict and its influence on the determination of this application will be assessed in further detail in the 'Planning Balance/Conclusion' section below.

Notwithstanding the conflict with Policy CP11, it is important to note that it pre-dates the National Planning Policy Framework by 14 years. CP11 does not make reference to telecommunications in the Countryside, nor do any other policies within the LPA's adopted policy basket. On the other hand, paragraph 119 of the NPPF clearly states that planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks. Furthermore, paragraph 123 states that LPAs should not question the need for an electronic communications system.

Alternative sites have also been considered (and will be assessed in further detail below), the weight applied to which will also be considered in the Planning Balance

below.

The LPA acknowledge that the NPPF affords significant weight on the need to support economic growth and productivity, as well as clear support for the expansion of electronic communications networks. It is not disputed that the economic benefits of the development for the UK economy would be significant; the applicant for this application appealed a decision made by Buckinghamshire Council for a very similar development in 2024 (APP/N0410/C/22/3301854) and whilst dismissed, the Inspector stated the following with regards to the economic benefits:

“...the potential benefits of the development to the UK economy are undoubtedly significant, particularly given the Framework’s objective to support economic growth and productivity and to build a strong and competitive economy. The scheme also contributes to the local economy through payment of utilities and services, as well as through job creation attributed to the construction and maintenance of the infrastructure. If a temporary condition were imposed, the reversibility of the scheme would also weigh in the development’s favour, as any permanent harm to the Green Belt would be diminished. I also note the other telecommunications infrastructure within the wider site, which helps avoid fresh encroachment into the countryside.”
(Paragraph 22)

Character of the Area/Landscape Character:

Policy Context:

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 MDD Local Plan states that development proposals should demonstrate how they have considered and achieved the following criteria within scheme proposals:

- Provide new or protect and enhance the Borough’s Green Infrastructure networks, including the need to mitigate potential impacts of new development
- Protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape feature
- Promote the integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside
- Incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme

Development proposals which would result in the loss, fragmentation or isolation of areas of green infrastructure will not be acceptable.

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 Site is located within the I4: Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland as defined in the Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment 2019. The area is described as a flat predominately pastoral landscape dominated by pony paddocks. The small scale field pattern and overgrown hedges result in an intimate character. There are a number of small watercourses and a network of water-filled drainage ditches frequently filled with rushes and wetland vegetation. Settlement is sparse, with post-war farmsteads and houses often hidden behind vegetation, linked by a dense network of rural roads.

Key characteristics of the LCA include:

- A flat to gently rising landform, at a low elevation of around 40m AOD. The area is underlain by London Clay with small pockets of alluvium and river gravels. Soils are affected by high groundwater and short term flooding which historically limited their suitability for arable farming.
- Wooded context provided by dense, overgrown rough hedgerows with hedgerow trees aligning winding rural roads, which creates an enclosed character.
- Small-scale regular and irregular fields, divided by overgrown hedgerows and post and wire fencing.
- Predominantly a pastoral landscape dominated by horse grazing and exercising paddocks, with areas of sheep grazing. There are also some larger areas of arable farmland.
- Low density settlement pattern of closely spaced farmsteads, although many are postwar bungalow style and many are hidden behind vegetation. There are clusters of listed buildings around Hurst, which has a Conservation Area, and the Grade II* 17th century Hurst Lodge. Large agricultural buildings and pylons are visible in this open landscape.
- Peaceful rural landscape with an intimate character with localised experience of dark night skies. The A321 runs north-south through the area and

introduces noise and movement.

Valuable Landscape attributes include:

- The intimate character of the small-scale pasture fields provides a distinctive sense of place.
- A rural and tranquil landscape due to the settlement pattern of closely spaced farmsteads linked by a network of country lanes character with localised experience of dark skies.
- Informal recreation provided by the footpaths west of the A321.

The most relevant key issue for the LCA, when taking into consideration the nature of the development proposals, is the increasing demand for large-scale agricultural buildings and vertical development e.g. pylons leading to visual intrusion of these elements.

To maintain the landscape character of the Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the rural pastoral intimate character. The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the small watercourse, ponds and drainage ditches, small scale pastoral fields, and wooded rural lanes. There is an opportunity to restore wetland features, reinstate hedgerow boundaries and improve grassland management, particularly in horse paddocks.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the low density settlement pattern of farmsteads along rural lanes and the small village of Hurst.

Assessment:

A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) was produced by Abseline Landscape Planning and is dated June 2025. It provides a summary of landscape effects in a Summary Table at paragraph 7.6 (page 24). In reviewing the three landscape receptors listed in the table, WBC Landscape and Trees noted that all three were at a larger landscape character area scale rather than considering the landscape effects on the Site and its contextual area.

In considering the reported landscape effects the three identified receptors and reported effects have been set out below:

Receptor	Distance, Direction	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Level of Effect
Character areas				
WB I4 Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland	Includes Site	Medium	Large/medium	Moderate, Adverse
WB I1 Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland	0.2km, south	Medium	Medium/small	Moderate/minor, Adverse
WB C2 Hurst River Terrace	0.5km, west	Medium	Small/negligible	Minor, Adverse

The assessors consider the landscape effect on the whole of the I4 Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland as **Moderate, Adverse**. No duration of effect is given but earlier in the LVA at 7.3.1 it is explained that,

‘The Proposed Development would be in operation for 10 years, which falls on

the threshold of Medium-term and Long-term duration as set out in the assessment methodology. It would not result in a permanent change to the landscape.'

The revisions made to the development proposals on 16th September 2025 reduced the temporary period sought from ten to five years. WBC Landscape and Trees have outlined that this has reduced the effect on LCA I4 to **Moderate Adverse and Medium term** (previously considered on the cusp of long term due to the ten year period proposed).

What also needs to be considered is the level of character change at the Site and within its context. The applicant has provided eight different viewpoint sketches of the masts, which will be referred to as VPs 1-8 throughout the assessment.

It is important to highlight that the outlines of the antennas on the VPs submitted are not an accurate representation of how they appear visually, rather they indicate the extent of their physical reach. As outlined above, the antennas are very thin and largely illegible to the human eye from further afield. The latticed structure of the masts and their modest widths are less visually prominent than the existing pylons, albeit taller.

VPs 1 and 2 (views from Wokingham Road and the eastern side of Nelson's Lane) put into perspective the size and visual presence of the masts proposed and their subsequent impacts on the immediate locale. The presence of pylon infrastructure within the area is noted and does assist the setting of the masts proposed, but it is important to remember that a key issue of the LCA is the increasing demand and vertical development which leads to further visual intrusion. Whilst acknowledged, the presence of existing pylon infrastructure avoids a brand new type of vertical encroachment into the Countryside, with any further long term impacts avoided by the imposition of a 5 year temporary period.

Slightly further afield, VPs 3 and 4 are from the perspective of users of the footpaths the photographs are taken from; VP3 is taken from a Public Right of Way (PROW) near Oakley Farm (STNH13), whereas VP4 is taken from a PROW immediately east of Church Hill and the Hurst Conservation Area (STNH19). The WBC Public Right of Way Officer has outlined that they have no objections to the proposals impact on the PROWs in proximity to the application site.

VP5 and VP7 consider are taken further afield and demonstrate that there would be limited viewpoints of the development from Lines Road and The Straight Mile. However, despite the screening, the masts would 'pop' into people's consciousness in longer views through gaps in the hedge network reminding them of their presence in the landscape. This would be for a limited period however, and is would not cause detrimental, long term harm to the landscape.

VP6 and VP8 demonstrate that there would be limited to no viewpoints of the masts from these locations, however they may become slightly apparent in the winter months of the year due to existing deciduous screening; the VPs were all taken during Spring.

Attention turns to the LCA's aims and goals. The most relevant guideline for the landscape is to:

*“Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes, **avoiding the introduction of visually prominent large-scale or vertical structures into this intimate scale landscape**”*

The proposed development would be contrary to this guideline and the development would intrude onto this intimate scale landscape. In a wider context, the LCA aims to conserve and enhance the rural pastoral intimate character which the proposals would be contrary to. This aim aligns with the goal of paragraph 187 b) of the NPPF that required development to enhance and protect the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic qualities of this part of the local countryside.

There are clear conflicts with the policies listed above, but consideration for the level of harm must be tempered by the 5 year temporary period sought. The applicant will be required to restore the land back to its original condition prior to the works occurring, avoiding any long-term harm to the landscape. The ‘reversibility’ of the scheme weighs in favour of the proposals despite the fact there would be a moderate level of harm to the site’s locale for the time the masts are present on site.

The LPA also acknowledge that the applicant has provided an extensive ‘Alternative Sites’ assessment which covers the constraints associated with the Data Centre’s 20km search radius. The assessment considers the following constraints:

- Physical constraints
- Heritage assets
- Ecological designations
- Flood Risk
- Heathrow Safeguarding
- Theoretical lines of sight
- Green Belt and National Landscapes
- Rights of Way

An area, north of Wokingham and within the settlement gap between Wokingham and Bracknell, was considered to offer the highest potential for a suitable site. The statement says that beyond this, only isolated pockets of suitable land exist.

The Council acknowledge the consideration for alternative sites within the identified 20km radius and the fact that constraints to the east of the radius make site selection in this direction difficult. It is considered that the weight applied for this assessment is moderate in the overall planning balance.

Heritage:

Policy Context:

Policy TB24 of the MDD Local Plan states that the Borough Council will conserve and seek the enhancement of designated heritage assets in the Borough and their settings by:

- a) Requiring works to or affecting heritage assets or their setting to demonstrate that the proposals would at least conserve and, where possible enhance the important character and special architectural or historic interest of the building, Conservation Area, monument or park and garden including its setting and views.
- b) Supporting development proposals or other initiatives that will conserve and, where possible, enhance the local character, setting, management and historic significance of designated heritage assets, with particular support for initiatives that would improve any assets that are recognised as being in poor condition or at risk.

Section 16 of the NPPF focuses of conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraph 212 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

Paragraph 214 of the NPPF states that Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- c) conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- d) the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

Paragraph 215 states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

Assessment:

Within the wider context of Hurst, there are several Areas of Special Character [AOSC] (Wokingham Road, Hurst Village Centre, The Old School House) and also the Hurst Conservation Area on Church Hill. There are clusters of Listed Buildings within all the areas identified above.

Views of the mast development proposed from the AOSCs listed above are considered to be negligible, assisted by the flat landscape and notable screening from green infrastructure along the roads and surrounding the historical areas. There may be opportunistic views of the masts during winter months but these are not likely to have any notable effect on their settings.

Similarly, Listed Buildings within the vicinity of the site are characterised by dense

enclosures, to the point that any views of the masts would not notably affect their setting.

Overall, the Built Heritage Officer has raised no objections to the proposed development's impact.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy requires development to be of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area 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.

LPU Policy C7 requires telecommunications development to minimise adverse impacts on local character, amenity, heritage assets, the quality of the public realm or pedestrian / highway safety.

The dwellinghouses known as Knowlands, Nicholas House, Grange Farm Bungalow and Nelsons Orchard are located between 100 and 150 metres south/south-east of the mast proposed to be erected in the open field, immediately north of the operations cabin proposed. From the Case Officer's visit to the site, views of the rear elevations and gardens of these properties are available at ground level from the location where the northernmost mast would be erected, assisted by the flat topography of the area.

Views of existing pylon infrastructure are already prevalent to the immediate rear of Grange Farm Bungalow, with views also visible to the side of Nicholas House's rear garden. The view to the rear of Knowlands' garden and rear windows is largely undisturbed except for skewed views of a pylon to the north-east and the overhead cables. Similarly, the views from the rear of Nelsons Orchard primarily overlook open grassland and hedgerow boundaries, with skewed views of nearby pylons.

With regards to the impact of the masts on nearby properties, the masts would be most prominent from Knowlands. Like views of the existing pylon infrastructure, views would be skewed from the property's rear garden. Views to the rear of Abbotts Lodge to the north of the masts would also be available, albeit limited by the site's well landscaped rear garden boundary. Views of pylon infrastructure are not alien features to residential properties adjacent to the Pheonix Park estate.

It is acknowledged that the visual amenities of several properties within the proximity of the masts would be affected by the vertical massing of them, albeit to a moderate extent due to the distances between the masts and the houses. The overall level of harm to their visual amenities would be limited, as the masts would only be in situ for a period of 5 years, avoiding any permanent long term impacts.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

WBC Highways do not anticipate any impacts on Highway Safety as a result of the proposed development.

Further to this, WBC Highways are satisfied that large vehicles (HGVs etc) associated with the construction of the development would be able to adequately turn on site and exit the site in forward gear.

The application is also supported by a Delivery and Servicing Plan which outlines how the masts would be delivered to the site safely. WBC Highways have reviewed this and have no objections to its contents.

Subject to conditions, WBC Highways raise no objections to the proposals.

Flooding and Drainage:

Surface Water Drainage:

WBC Drainage have reviewed the submitted Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy report (Calibro, 5th June 2025) and raise no objections to the proposals, primarily on the grounds the impermeable area of the development is relatively negligible.

Subject to a condition requiring compliance with the aforementioned report, no objections are raised in this regard.

Flooding:

The development proposed would be located within Flood Zone 1, however the access to the site through Pheonix Park Industrial Estate is largely located within Flood Zone 2.

The Environment Agency have reviewed the submitted Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy report (Calibro, 5th June 2025) and are satisfied that the development will meet the National Planning Policy Framework's (NPPF) requirements, in relation to flood risk, providing a condition is imposed ensuring compliance with the report.

Further to this, the condition recommended restricts built development or land raising within the 1% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP), plus climate change allowances, flood extent in accordance with Figure 3-1 in the report.

Arboricultural Matters:

The masts and associated ancillary buildings/infrastructure are adequately sited away from any existing vegetation to avoid any adverse harm to it. There are no objections on these grounds.

Ecology:

Bats:

This application is accompanied by a preliminary ecological appraisal (Pro Vision, June 2025). This report concludes that as the development involves no increases in light levels, there are no anticipated impacts to the local bat population.

If recommended for approval, a condition would be imposed restricting any further lighting without the approval of the LPA.

Great Crested Newts:

The proposed development falls within an amber impact risk zone for great crested newts, indicating an area with suitable habitat and potential presence of the species. There are over ten ponds within 500m of the application site, mostly to the north and

west and at a distance of over 250m. The nearest pond is approximately 200m west of the application site and appears to have some connectivity to the site via areas of suitable habitat.

The applicant has supplied a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA; Pro Vision Ecology, June 2025) which recommends some precautionary working methods in order to avoid potential impacts on great crested newts. The PEA identified suitable habitat for great crested newts within the application site and a great crested newt survey was not carried out, so the possible presence of great crested newts cannot be ruled out. As only a very small area of suitable habitat 200m distant from a pond will be impacted, WBC Ecology Newts agree that a non-licensed precautionary approach is appropriate. Therefore, WBC Ecology Newts recommend a compliance condition is used to ensure the precautionary working methods in the PEA are complied with.

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.

The primary aim for net gains is to maintain enhancements for a minimum period of thirty years. Due to the temporary nature of the development proposed, this cannot be reasonably achieved or enforced upon.

The submitted BNG metric indicates that the proposals would result in a 17.87% gain in habitat units and a 15.38% increase in hedgerow units, primarily achieved through on-site planting.

As the LPA cannot ensure that the impact of the development on local habitats can be maintained for a period of 30 years, it is reasonable to impose a condition requiring the complete restoration of the land back to its original condition prior to the development occurring before or on the expiry date of the 5 year period sought.

Contamination:

The site is wholly located within a potentially contaminated land zone. Due to the modest footprint of the development at ground floor level and minimal ground intrusions, it is unlikely that the development would be adversely affected in this regard.

That said, an unexpected contamination condition will be imposed as a precaution.

Archaeology:

The areas of ground impacts include 2 antennas mast bases with piled foundations, new cabins on bearers above ground level, neither of which will have substantial ground impacts.

Therefore, although there is a potential prehistoric site c.200m south of the development, Berkshire Archaeology do not consider that the proposal warrants investigation, given the limited impacts.

No objections are therefore raised on these grounds.

Planning Balance/Conclusion:

The statutory starting point for determination is the development plan. The development is considered unacceptable in principle due to its conflict with Core Strategy Policy CP11's requirements. Significant weight is generally applied to this conflict but in this instance, the weight is downgraded to moderate due to the temporary nature of the development, and the fact that the NPPF provides support for such development (which CP11 pre-dates by 14 years).

There would be notable harm to the local landscape that surrounds the masts and conflicts are noted with the LCA's development aims. Moderate weight is applied to this harm as there would be no permanent/long term impacts resulting from the development, subject to remediation condition after the five year period.

The proposals would also minorly harm the visual amenities of several nearby residential properties. The weight applied to this harm is limited given the temporary nature of the proposals and extent of the impacts highlighted.

Turning to the benefits of the proposed development, the LPA acknowledge that the potential benefits of the development to the UK economy are undoubtedly significant, particularly given the Framework's objective to support economic growth and productivity and to build a strong and competitive economy. The scheme also contributes to the local economy through payment of utilities and services, as well as through job creation attributed to the construction and maintenance of the infrastructure. The temporary nature of the development however limits the economic weight afforded to the benefits to significant.

Consideration for alternative sites is welcomed but ultimately, only moderate weight can be afforded to these efforts.

When engaging the planning balance, the LPA consider that the benefits highlighted are considered to outweigh the areas of temporary harm outlined. The development is therefore recommended for approval, subject to conditions.

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	
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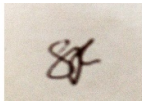
Conditions agreed:	Not required
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Recommendation:	Approval
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Date:	15 October 2025
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Earliest date for decision:	12 July 2025
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Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
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Date:	15.10.25
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