

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	251715
Site Address:	128 Church Road, Earley, Wokingham, RG6 1HR
Expiry Date:	18 September 2025
Site Visit Date:	18 December 2024
Proposal: Full application for the proposed installation of statues to the elevations and roof of the building.	

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 CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping TB22 – Sites of Urban Landscape Value TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
240330	Application for submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning consent 231300 (dated 25/08/2023). Condition 5 Parking details.	Approved: March 2024
240331	Non-Material Amendment to planning consent 231300; to allow substitution of the original drawing reference relating to parking provision.	Approved: March 2024
231300	Full application for the proposed change of use of the existing building to a mixed use of 1 no. dwelling and a place of worship with associated parking. (Part retrospective)	Approved: August 2023

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal
WBC Green Infrastructure – No comments WBC Ecology – No comments

External
None

REPRESENTATIONS		
Earley Council	Town	No objection
Ward Member(s)		No comments received
Neighbours		One letter received in support of the proposal

APPRAISAL
Site Description: The application site comprises a bungalow within a large plot on Church Road, Earley. Church Road is made up of a mixture of detached and semi-detached single and two storey dwellinghouses. Many of these dwellinghouses have had alterations and extensions. Whilst there is a mixture of dwellinghouses, they show a predominantly urban residential road in the centre of Earley. The site is adjacent to the large public open space which joins the Addington School, Bulmershe School and Bulmershe Leisure Centre. Proposal: This application seeks planning permission for the erection of various statues/additions to the existing property. These include: • 108 Prayer Wheels (made of copper) with some affixed to the external elevations of the property. • A Dharma Wheel and accompanying Deer (x2) statues (made of copper coloured gold) above the main front entrance to the property. • Ganjira (Gajur) x3 (made of copper and coloured gold) which are proposed to be erected at the centre of the property's existing roof and standing above the ridge line, and; • A Buddha statue (made of copper and coloured gold) which will be placed at the front of the property and upon a raised platform/plinth. Principle of Development: The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The site is located within settlement limits and as such the development should be acceptable providing that it complies with the principles stated in the Core Strategy. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high quality design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land uses and occupiers.

As seen from the planning history listed above, the application site is in mixed use, having been granted a personal planning permission for the use of the premises as a place of worship in August 2023.

The proposal, also listed in further detail above, seeks to develop and decorate the existing building with statues and additions that are in accordance with the Buddhist faith.

Policy CP2 of the Core Strategy seeks to ensure that new development contributes to the provision of sustainable and inclusive communities (including the provision of community facilities) to meet long term needs.

The National Planning Policy Framework at Paragraph 97(a) states:

'To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

- a) plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;'*

The proposed features are considered to be fundamental to the beliefs of Buddhism. As such, they would assist in creating a community facility for those who practice Buddhism (a minority group) but also for others who may choose to use the facilities and services provided as a result of the application. Subsequently, the proposal is considered to meet the objectives of national and local policy.

Character of the Area: As stated within the accompanying Planning Statement, the statues would clearly alter and largely depart from the existing residential appearance of the property. It is important to note that Condition 1 of Planning permission 231300 requires the use to return to a dwellinghouse should the Buddhist Gumba Reading UK cease to use the place of worship. This condition was included in the decision to prevent the loss of a single dwelling house and in the interest of amenity for the area. The proposal would have a significant impact on the property's contribution to the street scene, which is otherwise fully comprised of other residential dwellings. Notwithstanding, the development proposed would be reflective of the use of the building as a place of worship, such that a departure from its existing residential appearance cannot be considered harmful in itself, as it relates to the lawful Buddhist place of worship. It is thought that the more relevant matter under consideration through the proposed scheme is the scale of the development, not the nature of it.

When assessing the impact to the street scene and/or wider area, it is considered that the three Ganjira statues would have the most significant impression, being located on the ridge of the existing property, with heights ranging from 0.9 to 1.1 metres. In contrast to the other additions, these would be visible throughout views of Church Road. Nonetheless, it is also acknowledged that the statues would be contained to a small section of the roof line, which is set back from the road, such that they would not be overly imposing.

The other more notable element of the development is the 108 prayer wheels that are intended to be affixed across all four elevations of the existing property. Whilst the erection of these features would clearly impact the appearance of the existing building, it is also accepted that, as with all the individual components of the proposal, they would not significantly alter the structure of the existing building, which would retain its current form. Furthermore, the prayer wheels are unlikely to have a significant street presence, owing to their position on the property and the presence of the established brick boundary across the front boundary of the site.

In contrast to the features already discussed, both the Dharma wheel, deer's and the Buddha statue are considered to be modest additions to the property and would have an insignificant impact on the wider area.

Referring back to the proposal as a whole, consideration is placed on the fact that the statues could be easily removed, if required in the future. As such, due to the reversible nature of alterations, this is likely to reduce any concerns relating to the permanent impact on character.

In summary, the proposed additions are reflective of the use of the building as a place of worship. As such, whilst they would cause a departure from the existing residential appearance, it is not considered there would be any harm to the visual amenity of the existing property as a result, nor would they be overly imposing within the setting of Church Road (providing they are removed if the use were to cease and the building returned to a single dwellinghouse). The proposal is therefore considered to comply with Policies CP1 & CP3 of the Core Strategy.

Neighbouring Amenity: Due to the nature of development and the separation distance between the application property and neighbouring sites, it is not expected that the proposal would give rise to any neighbouring amenity concerns.

Ecology: The property partly falls within an area suitable for hosting bat roosts, however, due to the limited operations associated with the development, it is not anticipated that there would be any adverse impact upon bats. An informative has been included to advise the applicant on the measures to take if bats are encountered during development.

Conclusion: For all the above, the proposal is acceptable, and the application is 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:	Approve
Date:	11 September 2025
Earliest date for decision:	18 August 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	11 September 2025

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Major Development Location of Earley

Bat Roost Habitat

Tree Preservation Orders (1154-2006), (1154-2006) & (0003-1951)