

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	250939
Site Address:	Maidenhead Aquatics, Garden Centre House, 656 Reading Road, Winnersh, Wokingham, RG41 5HG
Expiry Date:	22 October 2025
Site Visit Date:	16 May 2025
Proposal:	Full application for proposed single storey side/front extension to existing building to facilitate additional shop space (retrospective).

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 CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits CP15 – Employment Development
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 CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB15 – Major Town, and Small Town/District Centre development TB18 – Garden Centres and other small rural units outside Development Limits TB20 – Service Arrangements and Deliveries for Employment and Retail Use TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation DM3 - Protection of Habitats and Species DM5 - Protection of the Countryside DM9 - Protecting Health, Safety and Amenity DM10 - Flood Risk DM11 - Water Resources DM15 - Site History

Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging ER4 – Employment and skills plans DH2 – Safeguarding amenity DH3 – Shopfronts DH4 – Advertisements and signage HC9 – Contaminated land and water
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
T/1996/64105	Application for temporary permission for use of greenhouse for display of Christmas Goods	Temp permission given for 5 years 07/08/91996
F/1996/64571	Proposed erection of greenhouse area and retrospective approval of part of existing greenhouse area	Conditional approval 16/12/1996
F/1996/64671	Proposed Site Access Improvements	Approved 31/01/2001
O/1998/68661	Outline Application for proposed redevelopment of site for mixed A3 and D2 Use with car parking and new access	Refused 25/02/2000 Appeal dismissed 27/09/2000
TP/2001/4709	Application for temporary permission for use of greenhouse for display of Christmas goods	Conditional approval 05/10/2001
VAR/2005/6241	Variation of Condition 1 of consent F/1996/64671 to vary time limit for the implementation of planning permission for a further 3 years.	Conditional approval 13/01/2006
153195	Application for change of use of part of site to car wash and valet service, installation of double canopy, wash screen and cabins for customer waiting, office/rest room and secure storage, landscaping and fences (retrospective)	Refused 21/01/2019
200560	Full application for the proposed extension and reconfiguration of the existing car park.	Approved 15/04/2020
201545	Application for submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning consent 200560 (dated 15/04/2020) 3. External materials 6. Electric Vehicle Charging 7. Landscaping	Approved 28/07/2020
202668	Full application for the change of use of part of site to car wash and valet service, installation of double canopy, wash screen and cabins for	Refused 09/02/2021

	customer waiting, office/rest room and secure storage, landscaping and fences, and modification of drainage to link to that of the car park. (Retrospective)	Appeal - Declined to determine 30/03/2021
214114	Full application for the part change of use application for relocation, replacement and reconfiguration of existing car wash & valet service including retention of the canopy and wash screens, with proposed modification to link surface water run off to that of the proposed drainage of car park. (Retrospective)	Approved 06/04/2022
221999	Application for submission of details to comply with the following condition of planning consent (214114) dated (06/04/2022) condition 2. Removal of additional structures, condition 3. Details of Planting Scheme.	Approved 05/08/2022

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Drainage – Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) requested.
WBC Highways - Request further information in respect of staffing levels.
WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection.
WBC CIL – CIL liable.

External

None.

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	One letter of concern relating to the retrospective nature of the application.
Ward Member(s)	Two letters of concern relating to the retrospective nature of the application.
Neighbours	No comments received.

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site forms part of the wider Garden Centre site which is adjacent to the River Loddon. The application building is located approximately 60m east of the river and in flood zone 3 on the Environment Agency (EA) flood mapping. Flood zone 3 contains land that has a high probability of flooding from rivers. The site is located on Reading Road on the southwest quadrant of a major traffic intersection. Reading Road is a designated Green Route Enhancement Area.

The site is bordered by Tree Preservation Order (TPO) TPO-0552-1992 which is defined as a Woodland TPO and protects all trees surrounding the site including Oak, Willow, Alder and Hawthorn.

Proposal:

This application seeks retrospective approval for the erection of a single-storey side/front extension to create additional retail space. The extension would measure approximately 9.53m (maximum) in width and 24.75m (maximum) in length. Alterations to the original building are also proposed and would serve ancillary office space.

NOTE:

The planning officer acknowledges the three letters of concern received regarding the retrospective nature of the application. Whilst the retrospective nature of the application is recognised, the Local Planning Authority is required to assess the application in the same way as a proposed application. The fact that the development has already occurred does not influence the outcome of the decision. Each application is determined on its planning merits and material considerations.

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 proposed development is located within Countryside and therefore is limited by the principles outlined in policy CP11 of the Core Strategy 2010. Policy CP11 aims to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment and states proposals outside of development limits will not be granted planning permission except where it contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprise, and do not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from original buildings.

The application site is not designated as a Core Employment Area (CEA) within Core Strategy Policy CP15. This policy indicates that most employment development will be carried out within the designated CEAs, outside of CEAs there is scope for proposals within development limits i.e. not Countryside. However, the supporting text for MDD Policy TB11 confirms that Policy CP11 is the relevant employment policy for proposals outside of development limits.

The NPPF is a material consideration in the planning balance. Paragraph 89 provides further emphasis on the need to consider sites outside of development limits for suitable employment development:

“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.”

The proposed DIY building materials retail unit would deliver economic benefits such as the creation of employment opportunities, as well as contributing positively to the local economy through increased expenditure in nearby services and businesses.

The NPPF defines previously developed land as “Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed) and any associated fixed surface infrastructure.” The application site is an existing garden centre complex with many other commercial units, and so this proposal is deemed as within previously developed land. Furthermore, whilst the application site is in countryside, it borders the major settlement areas of Winnersh and Lower Earley which are located within close proximity to the site.

Overall, the proposed development accords with relevant policy CP11 and is supported by the NPPF in principle subject to there being no unacceptable impacts and when weighed against other national policy aims, principally recognising the character of the countryside.

Character of the Area:

The application site is located in countryside between and close to the urban settlement boundaries of Earley and Winnersh. The site is located on the southwest quadrant of a roundabout in a highly visible location.

The application site forms part of the larger Winnersh Country Gardens garden centre site. The wider site comprises a number of commercial businesses which include the garden centre, Maidenhead Aquatics, Pets Corner, Skinners Sheds and FS Carwash. The garden centre and other businesses share one main entrance with access off Reading Road and associated car parking. Prior to the current building materials sales unit, the building had operated as a hot tub show and sales business.

The host building is located close to the main entrance and is clearly visible from Reading Road public viewpoints. However, it is not considered to have any significant detrimental impact on the character of the area since the extension is single-storey and of a modest height. The extended building is surrounded by other buildings and structures and does not appear to be an intrusive feature within the streetscene. Due to the presence of other taller structures in and around the application site, the extended building does not appear as overly dominant and is considered acceptable.

CP11 (1) of the Core Strategy states that proposals must contribute to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, and (2) development that does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original building.

Whilst the extension boasts a relatively large footprint, the additional built form is sited on what was previously a raised platform to provide space for an external showroom for the display of hot tubs and two timber outbuildings. Therefore, the location and scale of the development would not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building away from the previous built form on site.

While there is no explicit definition of a “rural enterprise” within planning policy, Paragraph 88 of the NPPF is useful in clarifying that planning policies and decisions should enable the “sustainable growth and expansion of all types of businesses in rural areas both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings”. Therefore, it would be unreasonable to limit the interpretation of ‘rural enterprise’ to not include those existing enterprises which are located and operate in rural locations such as this. As such, it is not considered that the economic approach of the NPPF would directly conflict with the economic objectives of Policy CP11.

The extended retail building would expand the business opportunity of the Do It Yourself (DIY) building material shop to enable the continued use of the building as a retail unit within the countryside. The use is similar in nature to the previous use of the building as a hot tub sales and showroom business. The NPPF supports the expansion and increased variety of these types of existing businesses within the countryside, and the proposal is therefore not considered to conflict with the relevant provision of Policy CP11.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Overlooking, Loss of Light & Overbearing:

Due to the location of the development and significant separation distances from the nearest residential properties, there are no detrimental impacts of this nature that would arise.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Policy CC07 and Appendix 2 of the MDD Local Plan stipulates minimum off street parking standards, including provision for charging facilities. P3 of the Borough Design Guide SPD notes that parking spaces are to be a minimum of 5m x 2.5m.

The proposal is for the erection of a 332sqm building for commercial use within the wider site of the existing garden centre. The WBC Highways Officer was consulted and requested information regarding the proposed staffing levels.

The application form states that the proposed staffing levels would comprise four full time and two part-time employees. However, an email from the planning agent (dated 20/10/2025) confirmed that the owner plus one additional staff member is required for the day to day running of the business. This has addressed the Highways request for further information.

The council has specific parking standards for Class E (old Class A) use and recommends a provision of at least 17 spaces. Whilst the site plan indicates four on-site parking spaces, it is recognised that the site falls within the wider garden centre which has parking facilities for 141 vehicles plus an overflow parking area within the immediate vicinity. It should also be noted that a number of the trips made to the garden centre would be of a dual purpose and as such the existing arrangements would be acceptable because it is unlikely to lead to a significant impact on the highway network. The existing access arrangements to the site are considered suitable to accommodate the unit and there is adequate turning area available within the site.

Parking for no. 4 vehicles has been indicated on the submitted site plan, as well as there being considerable additional unrestricted parking available within the wider garden centre site. Therefore, the proposed parking arrangements are considered acceptable to serve the development.

Flooding and Drainage:

Policy CC09 of the MDD Local Plan requires consideration of flood risk from historic flooding. The site and access are located within Flood Zone 3 and the development is classed as less vulnerable. Table 2 of the PPG states that less vulnerable development is not allowed within flood zone 3b, but can be allowed within flood zone 3a, if an FRA demonstrates that the development will not lead to an increase in flood risk on or off site.

The council's Drainage officer was consulted and objected to the development as a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) had not been submitted to support the application. Subsequently, a FRA was submitted however, the Drainage officer maintains their objection. They conclude that "Less vulnerable development is not allowed within the functional flood plain and based on that, I maintain my objection".

Whilst it is acknowledged that the retail building has a larger footprint than the original building, the extension maintains the floor levels of the original building. It also must be acknowledged that the application site and wider site have been operating as a garden centre for more than 20 years and it has been allowed to expand within the extent of the existing boundaries within a functional flood plain. Whilst this type of development may not normally be allowed in flood zone 3, the existing buildings and businesses are acceptable due to the existing nature of the original host building and built form within the surrounding garden centre. It is also noted that externally, the site had previously been overlain largely with impermeable patio slabs and a raised platform to display the hot tubs. Therefore, in terms of impermeable surfaces, the proposed change is small.

Therefore, due to the existing nature of the building, the finished levels are considered acceptable. However, it is therefore necessary and reasonable to condition a safe evacuation route from the building for public safety reasons. Section 8 of the submitted FRA plots a safe egress route to an area on Reading Road which is shown to be beyond the extent of flooding. The FRA also highlights the requirement for the user of the site to be registered with the Environment Agency (EA) Flood Alert service. An email from the planning agent (dated 06/10/2025) confirms that the applicant is signed up to the EA Alert service.

In summary, whilst the development is in flood zone 3, the flood warning and evacuation plan are adequate to ensure the safe use of the site in the event of a flood, subject to a condition to secure the details set out in Section 8 of the submitted FRA.

Landscape and Trees:

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 and Policy TB21 requires consideration of the landscape character.

The site is accessed along Reading Road off a major traffic intersection. The WBC Trees and Landscape Officer was consulted and raised no objection to the development. They commented:

“There are no trees of note nearby that could be directly impacted by the development.

A previous business on the same plot included maintained shrub planters which enabled the stock and display to integrate into the green infrastructure features of the area. This is missing from the proposed scheme to the detriment of the Green Route”.

The officer recommended a landscaping condition to be applied to any grant of approval. Whilst this is noted, the site is constrained and confined by the limited external space, of which most is designated parking. Therefore, it would not be reasonable to request landscaping when it would be to the detriment to the parking arrangements that are required to serve the development. As such, the condition will not be imposed.

Conclusion:

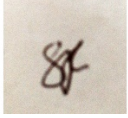
For the reasons set out above and subject to condition, the proposal is acceptable as it accords with local plan policy and guidance by virtue of the existing nature of the original building and commercial business.

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 reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. 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:	17 October 2025
Earliest date for decision:	18 September 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	22.10.25

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Countryside Location.
Green Route Enhancement Area.
Flood Zone 3.
Bat Roost Area.
Great Crested Newt Zone Amber.
Winnersh Ward.
Winnersh CP.