

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	261253
Site Address:	Flat, Woodford Park Leisure Centre, Haddon Drive, Woodley, Wokingham, RG5 4LY
Expiry Date:	7 August 2026
Site Visit Date:	22 June 2026
Proposal: Full application for the proposed change of use from residential dwelling (Class C3) to leisure centre (Class E).	

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 CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP17 – Housing Delivery
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC07 – Parking TB05 – Housing Mix
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Woodley Design Statement

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
161268	Application for certificate of lawfulness for the proposed change of use of the building to a fitness gym centre.	Approved: July 2016
25145	Erection of new hall and internal alterations to create caretakers flat and reorganisation and reconfiguration of existing golf course and car park.	Approved: April 1986

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No objection
WBC Drainage – No objection
WBC Highways – Request further information

WBC Growth & Delivery (Planning Policy) – No comments
 WBC Sports Development (Places and Neighbourhoods) – No comments
 WBC Waste Services – No comments
 WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments

External

Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments
 Sport England – Information provided

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	No comments received
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Background & Principle of Development: Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The application seeks full planning permission for the change of use of an existing two-bedroom flat from Use Class C3 (dwellinghouse) to Use Class E (commercial, business and service) to provide ancillary accommodation associated with the wider Woodford Park Leisure Centre.

The application site comprises a self-contained residential unit located within the wider leisure centre complex. Whilst the applicant contends that the flat historically formed part of the leisure centre, there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that any ancillary relationship remains extant in planning terms. The relevant historic planning permission is ref. 25145, which identifies the accommodation as a caretaker's flat for the public house that no longer exists. In any event, the submitted information confirms that the property has operated as an independent private dwelling for approximately ten years and is therefore properly assessed as a self-contained Class C3 dwelling.

Policy CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy seeks to ensure the delivery and retention of an adequate supply of housing within the Borough. Amongst other matters, the policy states that planning permission will be granted only where development:

- i) does not lead to the net loss of dwellings, other residential accommodation, or land allocated for housing.

Policy CP3 aligns with the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, as set out in Section 5 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The policy therefore seeks to safeguard the Borough's existing housing stock by resisting the unjustified loss of residential accommodation.

It is also relevant that the Council cannot currently demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. In these circumstances, the loss of an existing dwelling attracts additional weight in the overall planning balance.

The proposal would result in the permanent loss of a self-contained residential unit. There is no evidence to suggest that the dwelling is no longer capable of continued residential occupation, nor has it been suitably demonstrated that its retention as housing is unviable or inappropriate.

The Planning Statement provides only limited justification for the proposed loss of the dwelling, stating that the development would *"enable the accommodation to be brought back into operational use as part of the wider Leisure Centre, supporting the Council's sports, recreation and wellbeing functions."* Moderate weight is afforded to the potential benefits associated with supporting the operation of the Leisure Centre and the provision of sports, recreation and wellbeing activities. However, the evidence submitted does not demonstrate that the loss of the dwelling is necessary to secure those benefits or that they would outweigh the harm arising from the loss of an existing dwelling.

In subsequent correspondence, the applicant has also referred to operational difficulties associated with the flat's residential use, including issues relating to vehicle access and the shared nature of the site. Whilst these matters are acknowledged, they do not amount to compelling planning justification for the permanent loss of an established dwelling. In particular, no substantive evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the proposal is necessary to secure the continued operation, viability or enhancement of the leisure centre, or that no reasonable alternative solutions exist.

Similarly, limited weight is afforded to the fact that the flat was regarded as ancillary to the leisure centre when the application building was operated as a public house. The available evidence indicates that any such functional relationship ceased many years ago and that the property has since been established as an independent residential dwelling. The proposal must therefore be assessed on the basis that it would result in the loss of an existing Class C3 dwelling.

Whilst the proposal would provide some support to the operation of the existing leisure facility, this benefit attracts limited weight for the reasons set out above and does not outweigh the conflict with Policy CP3. In the absence of sufficient justification for the loss of the residential unit, the proposal is considered unacceptable in principle. It would result in the unjustified loss of a self-contained dwelling, at a time when the Council cannot demonstrate a five year housing land supply, contrary to Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy, which in part seeks to safeguard the Borough's housing stock.

Character of the Area: There are no external alterations proposed to the building and, as such, no concerns are raised in respect of character or design.

Neighbouring Amenity: The proposed change of use does not give rise to any concerns on neighbouring amenity grounds.

Highway Access and Parking Provision: WBC Highways have requested further information regarding whether the proposed change of use would increase the operational capacity of the leisure centre and, consequently, visitor numbers. The

Highways Officer advised that, should there be no increase in operational capacity, no highway objection would be raised. However, if visitor numbers were to increase, evidence would be required to demonstrate that the existing parking provision could accommodate the resulting demand.

In this instance, given the Council's in-principle objection to the proposal arising from the unjustified loss of an existing residential dwelling, it has not been necessary to seek the additional information requested by the Highway Authority.

Given the recommendation for refusal on principle grounds, no definitive conclusion is reached on the highway implications of the proposal and the matter is not relied upon as a reason for refusal.

Conclusion: The proposal would result in the permanent loss of a self-contained residential dwelling and no substantive justification has been provided to demonstrate that such a loss is necessary or that the benefits arising from the proposed leisure centre use would outweigh the conflict with adopted planning policy. The proposal is contrary to Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy and the NPPF objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes. The application is therefore recommended for refusal.

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:	N/A
Recommendation:	Refuse
Date:	20 July 2026
Earliest date for decision:	6 July 2026

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	21/07/26

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

- *Major Development Location of Woodley*