

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	243134
Site Address:	Land adjacent to Wessex Hall, Whiteknights Road, Earley, Wokingham, RG6 6BQ
Expiry Date:	11 February 2025
Site Visit Date:	22 January 2025
Proposal: Full application for the proposed installation of a drainage bypass interceptor/separator.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Core Employment Areas
Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Major Development Location (Earley)
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone
Local Historic Parks and Gardens
Local Wildlife Site
Nuclear Consultation Zone
Landscape Character Assessment Area
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
Local Wildlife Sites Consultation Zone
Listed Building Buffer Zone

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP2 – Inclusive Communities 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 CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB14 – Whiteknights Campus TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development

	TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	The site is not located in an area that would trigger requirements/ consideration of the JMWP.
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document

PLANNING HISTORY

None.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Drainage – No objection
WBC Highways – No objection
WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection subject to condition
WBC Built Heritage Officer – No objection
WBC Ecology – No comments received

External

Reading Borough Council – No objection
The Environment Agency – No comments received
Berkshire Gardens Trust – No objection subject to arboricultural conditions to protect adjacent trees (which contribute to the character and significance of the Whiteknights local historic park and garden)

REPRESENTATIONS

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

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site relates to Whiteknights Campus, University of Reading. The application site is located near Whiteknights Lake and Wessex Hall (halls of residence for university students). Whiteknights Campus is a locally designated park and garden.

Proposal:

Planning permission is sought for the installation of a Klargestar bypass fuel separator between Wessex Hall and associated parking areas, and Whiteknights Lake. Runoff from these areas currently drains freely into the Lake without interception, potentially polluting the water body.

The University of Reading have stated that they wish to minimise the risk of future pollution caused by hydrocarbon discharge into the Whiteknights Lake.

Upon completion, the excavated area will be refilled and reseeded.

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.

Given the site's location on the Reading University Whiteknights campus, policy TB14 of the MDD is also relevant as this policy centres around development in this location. It notes the national and international importance of the university and acknowledges that development will be needed that supports staff, students, teaching, research, accommodation, infrastructure and services. Which sets out how development on the Whiteknights Campus should be approached. The policy goes on to state that development proposals should accord with the following criteria:

- a) They respect the historic landscape, open areas and listed buildings and their settings and the character of the area*
- b) Areas of wildlife significance (including Local Wildlife Sites) and current or potential green infrastructure networks will be retained and enhanced*
- c) The safety of those using the campus (including highway safety issues and designing out crime) will be maintained and enhanced;*
- d) There are no significant detrimental impacts on neighbouring residential properties from the development, including from noise or parking; and*
- e) The loss of undeveloped areas on the site will be weighed against the benefits of development to the wider community.*

Each of the above criteria relate to other material considerations that need to be considered. In the conclusion of this report, it will summarise if the development complies with the above criteria.

In principle, the development, within settlement limits, is accepted. Development on Whiteknights Campus is also accepted in principle, subject to compliance with the criteria outlined in policy TB14 which interlink with other material considerations which will be discussed below.

Character of the Area:

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.

The development will almost entirely be below ground, with only a chamber cover visible at ground level. As such, this would have minimal impact on the character and appearance of the area and surrounding Whiteknights Campus, especially given following the excavation, the area will be refilled with spoil and re-seeded. This will be secured via condition to occur within 1 month of the successful installation of the bypass interceptor to ensure the area is closely restored to its former appearance in good time.

Impact on Local Park and Garden

Whiteknights Campus is a locally (non-designed) park and garden. Whilst there is no local policy on non-designated heritage assets, paragraph 216 of the NPPF applies and states:

The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

The Berkshire Trust were consulted and raised no objection to the proposal in principle but note that adjacent trees are in good condition and play an important role in contributing to the character and significance of the Whiteknights local historic park and garden. Conditions will be attached requiring the development to be carried out with the approved Arboricultural Method Statement (discussed further in the report in the 'Landscape and Tree' section) so that trees are not adversely impacted. Given the proposal is largely all below ground, with no built form above ground, this will have minimal visual impact on the local park and garden. Applying a balanced judgement, as per para 216 of the NPPF, the scale and nature of the proposal would not result in a high level of harm to the local park and garden.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy aims to protect neighbouring amenity and development should not be of detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life

The closest residential development to the application site is Wessex Hall (student accommodation). As the development is below ground, it would not result in neighbouring impact as there is no built form. The proposal will also not adversely affect land users (students on the campus) owing to the development having a minimal above-ground level appearance.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Policy CC07 states that planning permission will only be granted where a development can meet parking provision, the standards of which are in Appendix 2 of the MDD. Development should also not adversely affect the Highway network. Policy CP6 states that sustainable modes of transport should be accommodated for.

WBC Highways have reviewed the proposal and conclude it will not have a highway impact.

Flooding and Drainage:

Policy CC09 of the MDD states that *'all sources of flood risk, including historic flooding, must be taken into account at all stages and to the appropriate degree at all levels in the planning application process to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding'*. Policy CC10 of the MDD states that *'all development proposals must ensure surface water arising from the proposed development including taking into account climate change is managed in a sustainable manner.'*

The proposal was reviewed by the WBC Drainage Officer who raised no objection to the plans submitted.

Landscape and Trees:

Policy CC03 of the MDD states that development should protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features. Policy TB21 of the MDD states that proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

There are several notable (as listed on the Ancient Tree Inventory) oaks and a cherry which are close to/impacted by the works.

The WBC Tree & Landscaping Officer has reviewed the proposal and more specifically the submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Method Statement and Tree Survey. The rooting areas of T3, T4 and T6 have been altered to accommodate the root-suboptimal lake. Even with the worst-case scenario illustrated on the Tree Protection Plan, the interceptor/ separator unit would not directly impact the root protection area of T3 and T4. All relevant trees are to be protected from construction activities as described by the submission. It will be conditioned that the development is carried out in accordance with these arboricultural documents to protect on site trees.

In terms of landscaping impact, the unit is subterranean, with a discrete ground level top which will not unduly impact the landscape character of the area.

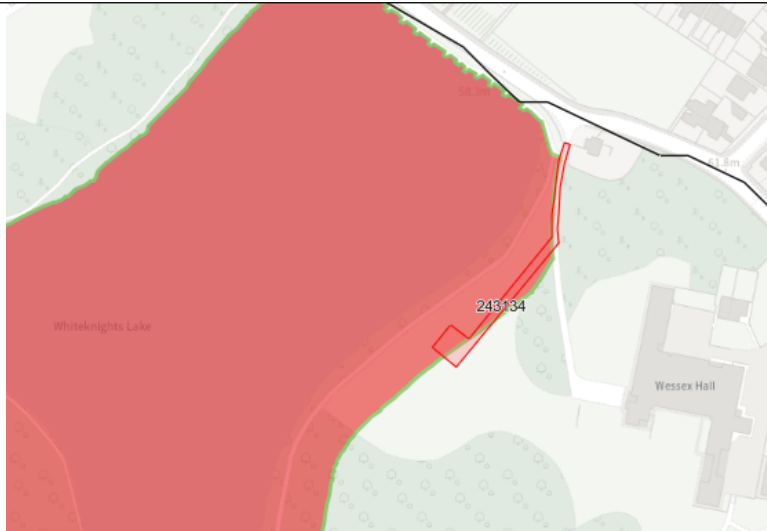
Ecology:

Policy CP7 of the Core Strategy and TB23 of the MDD seek to protect biodiversity.

National and Local Sites

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was submitted to support the application. It notes a number of statutory designated sites nearby such as the Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a number of Local Nature Reserves. However, the statutory sites do not fall within the Zone of Influence for the proposal.

In terms of local designations, part of the application site is located within Local Wildlife Park 'Whiteknights Park' and therefore is within the Zone of Influence for the proposal.



The Local Wildlife Site is highlighted in red, with the application site outlined also in red and indicated by the 6 digit reference number

The Local Wildlife Site comprises of Whiteknights Lake, woodland and grassland. The application site borders Whiteknights Lake (approx. 16m away at its closest point). Policy CP7 therefore applies. It states that:

Development

A) Which may harm county designated sites (Local Wildlife Sites in Berkshire), whether directly or indirectly,

will be only permitted if it has been clearly demonstrated that the need for the proposal outweighs the need to safeguard the nature conservation importance, that no alternative site that would result in less or no harm is available which will meet the need, and:

- i) Mitigation measures can be put in place to prevent damaging impacts; or*
- ii) Appropriate compensation measures to offset the scale and kind of losses are provided.*

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal fails to explicitly note how the proposal accords with the above policy. It does describe the need for the proposal (which is noted in the 'Proposal' section of the report) which is to avoid Whiteknights Lake being subject to pollution. However, it does not evaluate alternative sites.

The Officer view is that the justification for the development is noted and would have environmental benefits in terms of reducing potential pollution to Whiteknights Lake. Whilst alternative sites have not been explicitly explored, the proposal aims to solve a defect in the existing system. As such, the location of the development is dictated by existing infrastructure and is required to be located at the final pipe junction chamber, just as it flows to the outfall into the Whiteknights Lake. As such, whilst no alternative locations have been proposed, on balance, this is acceptable given the development is for a specific infrastructure purpose.

Turning to point (i) of CP7, The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal notes that the LWS may be affected by runoff or loose soil entering the water body. To prevent this, spoil must be stored a minimum of 10m away from the edge of the Lake. Refuelling of machinery or plant should not take place within 10m from the edge of the Lake and the water edge should be fenced off to prevent physical damage to the shoreline. As such, these are mitigation measures to place to protect the LWS during the construction phase. The separation distances noted above will be secured via condition. In terms of the operational phase, given the proposal is to minimise pollution into the Whiteknights Lake (part of the LWS), it is considered a benefit to the LWS. The interceptor is to be installed to link to existing underground infrastructure rather than creating a whole new system and therefore would be less intrusive.

In relation to point (ii), the development is of a relatively modest scale and ground level, but it is appreciated that excavation is required. However, it will be conditioned that the ground is re-filled and re-seeded to bring it back closer to its former state. Furthermore, mitigation has been proposed in the form of biodiversity enhancements on the wider site (owned by the applicant) such as the installation of bird boxes on nearby trees. Full details of this will be conditioned.

It is noted that the biodiversity enhancements will be outside of the red line boundary, but within the blue line boundary (so is still land owned by the applicant). As the biodiversity enhancements are still being carried out on land within the applicant's ownership, a S106 agreement is not considered necessary and a Grampian condition not appropriate as this can only secure works on land outside of the applicant's control.

Section 72 of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990) states

(1) Without prejudice to the generality of section 70(1), conditions may be imposed on the grant of planning permission under that section—

(a) for regulating the development or use of any land under the control of the applicant (whether or not it is land in respect of which the application was made) or requiring the carrying out of works on any such land, so far as appears to the local planning authority to be expedient for the purposes of or in connection with the development authorised by the permission;

Here, it states that conditions can be imposed on 'any land under the control of the applicant (whether or not it is land in respect of which the application was made)'. As such, it is appropriate to attach a condition to secure details and locations of biodiversity enhancements, of which can then be installed near/ around the site, within the blue line.

Whilst comments were received by the WBC Ecologist, Officers consider that the above assessment, with appropriate conditions will minimise harm to the LWS and in this circumstance, sufficient to accept the development under policy CP7.

Species

Bats

In terms of bats, the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal concludes that no further surveys are required as there are no plans to prune or fell any of the surrounding trees in relation to the works, and so there is no risk of disturbing or destroying bat roosts. However, opportunities for biodiversity enhancements such as bat boxes can be secured, as discussed above. No contrary comments from the WBC Ecologist were received.

Birds

The preliminary ecological appraisal states that vegetation on site and immediately adjacent provides suitable nesting and foraging opportunities, particularly associated with trees and hedgerows. However given the size of the site and the habitats available, the proposals are unlikely to have an adverse effect on the conservation status of these species, therefore no further survey effort is required. Again, bird boxes can be secured via condition as a form of biodiversity enhancement.

However vegetation surrounding the site provides opportunities for nesting birds, which could be disturbed by the works. The works should therefore take place outside of nesting bird season (March-October inclusive). Should this not be possible, a nesting bird check should be conducted by a suitably experienced ecologist no more than 24 hours prior to the commencement of works. Should nesting birds be found, the ecologist will set up an appropriate exclusion zone around the nest which must not be entered until chicks have fledged. This will be secured via condition

Badgers

A pre-commencement walkover check should be conducted by a suitably experienced ecologist no more than 24 hours prior to the commencement of works. This has been suggested by the applicant and will be secured via condition.

Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs are a Species of Principle Importance under S41 of the NERC Act 2006, and therefore sites with known hedgehog habitat nearby should provide enhancement measures for Hedgehogs. This can be achieved by providing hedgehog houses in the vegetation surrounding the site. This will be conditioned.

Biodiversity Net Gain

The development falls below the threshold for the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements. However, as discussed above, some biodiversity enhancements (primarily in relation to bats, birds and hedgehogs) are to be secured via condition.

Taking all the above into consideration, and with no contrary comments being received by the WBC Ecologist, the proposal is deemed acceptable in relation to policies CP7 and TB23.

Conclusion:

As referred to earlier within the report, policy TB14 is of importance for assessing this application as that policy refers specifically to Whiteknights Campus. Turning back to

the criteria of TB14, with Officer comments in bold, following review of material considerations:

a) They respect the historic landscape, open areas and listed buildings and their settings and the character of the area; ***Complies – due to the sub terranean proposal, it would not result in harmful impacts in this respect***

b) Areas of wildlife significance (including Local Wildlife Sites) and current or potential green infrastructure networks will be retained and enhanced; ***As discussed in the 'Ecology' section of this report, the proposal, subject to conditions, should not have an adverse impact on the LWS or species on site.***

c) The safety of those using the campus (including highway safety issues and designing out crime) will be maintained and enhanced; ***The proposal does not raise safety concerns or impact on the highway.***

d) There are no significant detrimental impacts on neighbouring residential properties from the development, including from noise or parking; ***Complies – due to the nature of the proposal and because neighbouring properties/ student accommodation are located substantial distances away from the application site.***

e) The loss of undeveloped areas on the site will be weighed against the benefits of development to the wider community; ***The proposal will see the loss of a piece of undeveloped land with a chamber cover. The benefits of the scheme, namely minimising pollution into Whiteknights Lake, is considered to substantially outweigh the small incursion of this undeveloped part of Whiteknights Campus.***

As such, the proposal complies with policy TB14 and does not raise substantial harm in terms of any material planning consideration. The recommendation is therefore to grant planning permission 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	
Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approve subject to the following conditions: 1. Time Limit 2. Approved plans 3. In accordance with section 4 of Ecological Appraisal 4. Details and locations of biodiversity enhancements to be submitted 5. Works to take place outside of bird nesting season 6. Works to be 10m from edge of Whiteknights Lake 7. Ground shall be refilled and re-seeded 8. In accordance with arboricultural information
Date:	29 January 2025
Earliest date for decision:	28 January 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	29/01/25