

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	250839
Site Address:	Woodlands House, The Burrow Site, Wargrave Road, Remenham, Wokingham, RG9 2LT
Expiry Date:	3 June 2025
Site Visit Date:	22 April 2025
Proposal: Full application for subterranean ground strengthening works adjacent to the access track and installation of permeable hardstanding and 1no. lean-to store for woodland management/forestry use (Retrospective).	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Green Belt
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone – Amber and Red Risk Zones
Ground Water Zones
Local Wildlife Site – Branfords Woodlands
National Historic Parks and Gardens – Park Place
Landscape Character Assessment Area
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
PRoW Within WB Consultation Zone
Green Routes and Riverside Paths Consultation Zone
Ordinary Watercourses Consultation Zone
Flood Zone 3

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 CP12 – Green Belt
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

	TB01 – Development within the Green Belt TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
210519	Full application for the proposed erection of 3No single storey storage buildings for woodland management/forestry use with porous surfaced hardstanding following demolition of existing stables and storage buildings and impermeable hardstandings within existing yard area.	Approved 22/04/2021
211635	Full application for subterranean ground strengthening works adjacent to the access track for contractors parking and ongoing use for occasional overspill parking in connection with estate-wide activities (retrospective)	Refused 16/06/2021
220511	Application to vary condition 2 of planning consent 210519 for the proposed erection of 3No single storey storage buildings for woodland management/forestry use with porous surfaced hardstanding following demolition of existing stables and storage buildings and impermeable hardstandings within existing yard area. Condition 2 refers to approved details and the variation is to allow the insertion of 2no. windows and 1no. door to the log store building.	Approved 24/03/2022

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Drainage – Request further information (see main body of report)
WBC Highways – No objections
WBC Landscape and Trees – No objections
WBC Public Rights Of Way – No comments received
WBC Built Heritage Officer – No objections
WBC Ecology – No comments received

External

Historic England – Advisory comments, entrust that the Council will apply the correct policy assessments
The Environment Agency – Concerns regarding the flood risk of the storage structure (see main body of report below)
Berkshire Gardens Trust – Concerns regarding the incremental developments and the harm caused to Park Place

The Garden Trust – No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	<i>Remenham Parish Council:</i> On 250839 (Woodland's House/The Burrow) RPC recalled that 211635 (retrospective - subterranean ground strengthening) had been refused by WBC. RPC was not aware that a change of situation now prevailed, but rather that water flows from the site were still affecting neighbouring properties and required attention. RPC therefore objects to the application and asks for further investigations by Enforcement.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The Burrows site is a woodland management/forestry yard that consists of three single storey storage buildings and an area of hardstanding for vehicle parking and the storage of large equipment.

The site is located within the Green Belt and within the Grade II* Listed Park Place National Historic Park and Garden.

Proposal Description:

This application seeks the retrospective approval for subterranean ground strengthening works adjacent to the access track, installation of permeable hardstanding and the erection of 1no. lean-to store.

The proposed lean-to and additional hardstanding form a small extension to the woodland management/forestry use consented by application 210519. It is acknowledged that the subterranean ground strengthening works adjacent to the access track were previously refused under application 211635 but this proposal included the use of the land for parking purposes, which is no longer proposed.

The description of development was altered part of the way through the application process to address two of the storage structures proposed for regularisation. These two structures were removed from the proposals as their temporary nature/construction and ancillary function with the overall forestry use meant that they did not require planning permission.

Principle of Development:

General:

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.

Green Belt:

Policy CP12 of the Core Strategy refers to national policy to enforce its aims, therefore attention turns to the 2024 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. National Green Belt policy has however substantially changed since the determination of application 212446, namely with the addition of the 'Grey Belt' definition with a primary focus on previously developed land.

Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 154 of the NPPF provides a list for exceptions for development that can be considered appropriate in the Green Belt. Of particular relevance to this application scheme is section a, which reads:

- a) Buildings for agriculture and forestry.

The lean-to store and hardstanding would be used in association with the existing forestry use of the site, representing compliance with paragraph 154 of the NPPF. Both elements of development are also very modest in scale and the storage structures are sited adjacent to the south-western elevation of the largest storage building on site. Their very limited scale and general enclosure within the existing development footprint would not have any notable harm on the openness of the Green Belt and are acceptable.

Turning to the subterranean ground strengthening works, this development does not technically form part of the forestry use of the site, nor does it fall within any of the other exceptions listed in paragraph 154. Therefore, by definition, these works are technically inappropriate development, but attention turns to paragraph 142 of the NPPF and the overarching aims for development in the Green Belt; the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

With this in mind, the ground strengthening works are entirely subterranean and have only been carried out to avoid further unnecessary disruption of the soil. The visual and spatial impacts on the openness of the Green Belt would therefore be negligible and the development would not conflict with the essential characteristics of Green Belts and their permanence.

Countryside:

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.

The forestry use proposed complies with CP11 (1) as it is considered a sustainable rural enterprise. With regards to CP11 (2), the modest scale of the development would not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings.

In terms of CP11 (3), this is not relevant to the application proposals. Notwithstanding this, section 11 of the NPPF encourages the most effective uses of land, specifically encouraging the use of previously developed (brownfield) land. The application site is considered brownfield land by reason of the original 210519 consent. As such, the development is supported at a National level in this regard.

The wording of Policy CP11 requires compliance with criteria 1, 2 and 3. Compliance with criteria 1 and 2 are noted and criterion 3 does not apply to the proposal. The proposed development is therefore acceptable in principle.

Character of the Area/Heritage:

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).

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;

Assessment:

The ground strengthening works have no visual impact on the character of the area or the setting of the Park Place National Historic Park and Garden and are acceptable.

With regards to the hardstanding and lean-to, both are very modest in scale and their visual impact on the wider setting of the area and Park Place would be negligible, particularly as they are associated with the existing forestry use of the site.

The concerns of Berkshire Gardens Trust are acknowledged regarding incremental development and its harm on the Park Place Park and Garden. However, in this instance there is no discernable visual harm caused, albeit minor (but acceptable) spatial harm due to the additional development footprint. The WBC Built Heritage Officer has outlined no objections to the development as a whole, in particular due to the proposals no longer using the area of land subject of the ground strengthening works for parking purposes. It is also important to highlight that the Council will still reserve the right to assess the harm associated with any future developments on the site and within Park Place.

To ensure the setting of Park Place and the surrounding Green Belt/Countryside are protected, the following conditions will be imposed:

- Restrict the use of the area of ground strengthening works to landscaped amenity only.
- Restricting the use of the lean-to store to forestry use only

Neighbouring Amenity:

There are no neighbouring amenity concerns.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

WBC Highways raise no objections to the proposals on highway safety grounds.

Flooding and Drainage:**Surface Water Drainage (WBC Drainage):**

The application site is located within Flood Zones 2 and 3. WBC Drainage have no objections to the proposals providing a drainage strategy is secured via condition. The Case Officer however considers this request unnecessary due to the very limited scale of the development, plus the fact it is retrospective.

Flooding:

This application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment (Innervision Design, May 2025).

As outlined above, the application site is located within Flood Zones 2 and 3. The ground strengthening works and hardstanding is located within Flood Zone 3, whereas the lean-to store is located within Flood Zone 2. It is important to note that as the development is associated with a forestry use, it is considered 'less vulnerable' as per the National Planning Policy Framework.

The Environment Agency were consulted on the development and raised no objections to the retrospective ground strengthening works or additional area of hardstanding. They did, however, raise concerns with the lean-to store and the displacement of water associated with it. Further to this, concerns were also raised with the nature of what would be stored within it.

In isolation from the other works, the lean-to store is considered a minor forestry (less vulnerable) development within Flood Zone 2 which is considered compatible as per Table 2 of the NPPG - Flood risk and coastal change. The only ground incursions associated with the development are several narrow timber posts which would negligibly impact any water displacement on site; the open-sided nature of the store would also allow flood water to flow through the structure with minimal interruptions. It is not considered that the lean-to would result in an increase in flood risk on site, or elsewhere.

In terms of the types of storage, the Council cannot reasonably control the exact materials/products stored within the lean-to, only that it would have to be related to the forestry use. That said, the main purpose of the lean-to is for timber which is commonly known to float at times of flooding, therefore representing minimal flood risk.

Overall, the development would have an acceptable impact on flood risk and therefore no objections are raised in this regard.

Landscape and Trees:

WBC Landscape and Trees have no adverse arboricultural or landscape concerns related to the proposed development.

Ecology:

Whilst the site is within Amber and Red risk zones for Great Crested Newts and within the consultation zone for the Branfords Woodlands Local Wildlife Site, the very limited scale of the development results in no adverse ecological concerns.

Conclusion:

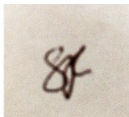
Overall, the proposed development is considered to accord with the development plan and is therefore recommended for approval.

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:	Approval
Date:	23 April 2025
Earliest date for decision:	3 May 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	24.6.25