

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer		
Service	Green Infrastructure	App No:	260966
Address:	Billingbear Lodge, Maidenhead Road, Binfield, Wokingham, RG40 5RU		
Proposal:	Householder application for the proposed erection of extensions and alterations to the dwelling with single storey rear extension to form annex, alterations to the roof form, and associated changes to fenestration, following the demolition and removal of the existing rear projection and associated structures.		
Heritage Asset:	Billingbear Lodge and stable block – non-designated heritage asset (NDHA) Billingbear Park – Locally listed Park & Garden and NDHA		
Site Visit Made:	Yes, external only.		

Summary Of Recommendations

Objection

Comments On Proposal

The application proposes the demolition of parts of Billingbear Lodge, and the total demolition of the associated stable block, with the subsequent erection of a part single, part two storey extension. Billingbear Lodge is a 19th century former entrance lodge for Billingbear House, located within Billingbear Park, a locally registered Park & Garden, as noted in the WBC Historic Environment Topic Paper (2024) and recognised as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). By virtue of its age, architectural and historic interest, as well as the positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area, Billingbear Lodge is also identified as a non-designated heritage asset.

Billingbear is a historic estate approximately three miles north-east of Wokingham. The estate was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 and following the Norman Conquest, the land came under Crown ownership before later being enclosed during the medieval period by the Bishop of Winchester, eventually returning once again to the Crown. In 1549, King Edward VI granted Billingbear to Sir Henry Neville who built a substantial Tudor mansion and landscaped deer park. Between 1841 and 1909 the mansion was leased to tenants, in which this time numerous alterations took place, including the construction of the gate lodge in the 1860s.

The house was destroyed by fire in 1924 and later demolished, although several architectural elements were preserved and relocated to sites including Bulmershe Court in Berkshire and Pace College in New York City, United States of America.

As the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (LUC, 2019) states:

“There was a medieval deer park at Billingbear, first mentioned in 1208. The parkland around Billingbear Park is now cultivated land, although two fishponds remain. The ‘Bear’ name is possibly indicative of the presence of ‘bare’ or swine pasture. It has also been suggested locally that it could relate to the ancient practice of bear baiting within the borough.”

And that:

“Billingbear Park, now in use as a golf club, is also locally listed and was originally a much larger medieval deer park. It was associated with a Tudor mansion of the same name, which burned down in 1924 and the extent of the original park can be reconstructed from maps and surviving field patterns and extends across the district boundary.”

Given that the site is identified as heritage asset, a planning application is mandatorily required to be accompanied by a heritage statement, as set out in paragraph 207 of the NPPF. At the present time the application does not contain an appropriate heritage assessment and thus is devoid of information in this respect.

The National Planning Policy Framework states that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource, and that the effect of proposals upon the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application.

The application proposes the total demolition of an ancillary stable block associated with the lodge, and the partial demolition of part of the building, with the subsequent construction of two-storey and single storey extensions. Whilst the application has failed in its requirement to submit a heritage statement, as required under para. 207, the following assessment is made in accordance with para. 208.

Billingbear Lodge is a former gate lodge house, constructed in c1860s in a typical Victorian ‘gothic-light’ manner with the archetypal character of an estate entrance lodge. The building served as the lodge for the south-west entrance to Billingbear, with other lodges to the east and north of the Park – both these other lodges have been demolished, which places further emphasis on the significance of remaining Billingbear Lodge. Despite the previous two-storey addition, and unsympathetic alterations, such as the uPVC windows, the building still positively contributes to the character and appearance of the immediate vicinity, and to the understanding of Billingbear as an enclosed historic park. The ‘lodge character’ is particularly prevalent when approaching the building from the south-west on the convergence of the old Maidenhead Road and the Straight Mile, the gabled form in combination

with the historic estate road entrance adjacent, strongly evocative of the archetypal gate lodge aesthetic.

Cartographic evidence places an ancillary stable structure in this location since at least the 1870s, although it is likely it was originally constructed concurrently with the lodge house a decade or so before. The building was altered in the inter-war period, with an interesting loggia type arrangement facing the garden, and a hybrid of Gaelic and plain roof tiles. The former stable and carriage doors face what was the yard, now occupied by a modern single storey bungalow/office building. Overall, the building has significant interest, through the contribution to the gate lodge host itself, the wider Billingbear Park and the prevailing traditional character and appearance of the vicinity.

The application proposes the demolition of the stable building, thus resulting in the total loss of the structure. This would undoubtedly seek to harm the significance of the NDHA, Billingbear Park and to the historic and traditional character of the vicinity. The roads and lanes in the area are peppered with similar type buildings, including just a couple of hundred yards down the road – and thus are, in part, characterised by this form and use-type. By contrast, the proposed single-storey de facto replacement extension to the house, whilst similar in form, lacks any architectural or historic interest, and thus would seek to dilute the character of the vicinity. Further to this, the proposed two-storey extension would result in a substantial erosion to the lodge character of which the NDHA draws part of its significance. This lodge character results from a relatively modest, subservient building (in relation to the main host) with a simple, yet distinguished form. To further extend the building would result in an overly grand dwellinghouse, which would be far removed from the original lodge building. The proposed loss of architectural features such as the chimney, and (now linked) 19th century ancillary structure, would further erode the historic character of the building.

Furthermore, the proposed vehicular gates, through their size and design, would result in a 'compound' type effect, closing down the visibility, and thus understanding of the site. There is no fundamental objection to vehicular gates here, as the concept is not alien to the estate entrance context. However, the design should relate better to this historic character of the estate and lodge building, with reference drawn from traditional estate gates, either in metal or timber. The design should have less solidity with greater through-visibility. It should also be noted, that as this development requires planning permission, it should be named in the description of development, of which it is currently not.

Given the above, the proposed alteration of Billingbear Lodge, and the loss of associated stable block would result in the highest level of harm to the non-designated heritage asset. This harm would be akin to 'substantial' or 'total loss' in NPPF terminology (in reference to a designated heritage asset) through the permanent demolition of the building. Furthermore, through the form, scale and massing, in combination with the loss of historic fabric, the proposed alterations would seek to erode the historic character of the lodge as an ancillary building in relation to the historic Billingbear Park, resulting in harm to its significance.

Given the identified harm, the proposed development would conflict with Policy CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy and Policy TB26 of the Managing Development Delivery local plan. Furthermore, the application conflicts with Principle G1 of the Borough Design Guide SPD which requires that:

“Development must respond positively to its site and local context, including; Heritage assets and their settings, for instance archaeological features, listed buildings, historic parks and gardens and conservation areas;”

As such, an objection is raised against the application with refusal advised.

Conditions			
N/A			
Date:	24/05/2026	Signed:	Roderick McDonald Built Heritage Officer