

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	252790
Site Address:	Rowes Farm Clubhouse, Farley Hall Equestrian Centre, Church Road, Swallowfield, Wokingham, RG7 1TJ
Expiry Date:	24 March 2026
Site Visit Date:	3 February 2026
Proposal: Full application for the change of use of the building to a fitness / massage business (Use Class E). (Retrospective)	

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 CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits
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 CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB08 – Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities Standards 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 DM4 - Protection of Designated Landscape DM5 - Protection of the Countryside DM9 - Protecting Health, Safety and Amenity DM10 - Flood Risk DM15 - Site History
Wokingham Borough Local	SS15 – Securing infrastructure SS16 – Safeguarded routes SS17 – Transport improvements CE6 – Reducing energy consumption in existing buildings

Plan Update (LPU)	CE7 – Low carbon and renewable energy generation CE8 – Protecting renewable energy generation C3 – Active travel C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging DH2 – Safeguarding amenity DH4 – Advertisements and signage
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document Swallowfield Village Design Statement

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
000804	Proposed change of use of farm building to storage use (B8).	Approved 05/06/2000
071523	Proposed change of use from agricultural and Class B8 (storage and distribution) to livery yard to include erection of stabling and change of use of agricultural land to mixed agricultural/equestrian use.	Approved 23/05/2007

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No comments received.
WBC Drainage – No objection.
WBC Highways – Further information requested and has been submitted.
WBC CIL – No comments received.

External

None.

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	No comment to make.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received.
Neighbours	No comments received.

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application building was the former clubhouse for Farley Hill equestrian centre livery yard. The building is located along the northern edge of a central courtyard with stable blocks edging the remaining courtyard.

The application site is outside settlement limits in countryside.

Proposal:

This application seeks retrospective approval for the change of use of an existing building from an equestrian clubhouse associated with Farley Hall Equestrian Centre to Class E use comprising a fitness and massage business.

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 Wokingham Countryside and classified as a rural location. It is therefore limited by the principles outlined in policy CP11 of the Core Strategy (CS) 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.

Attention has to turn to whether the proposal meets any of the criteria of CS policy CP11, noting that criterion 3-7 are not applicable in this case as no built form is proposed. The development would involve the re-use of an existing structure within an established equestrian site forming part of a wider rural estate. As the development would remain contained within the footprint and form of the existing building, it would not result in the encroachment of development beyond the established built form within the site. While it is acknowledged that the proposed use is not inherently dependent on a countryside location, the proposal represents the sustainable re-use of an existing rural building rather than new development in the countryside. The proposal would therefore avoid unnecessary new construction and would not result in the outward expansion of development or harm to the character and openness of the surrounding rural area, in accordance with CS Policy CP11.

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 of the NPPF 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 application site is located beyond settlement limits. In line with paragraph 89 of the NPPF, paragraph 5.32 of the submitted Planning Statement (ET Planning) states that sustainable transport opportunities are promoted and include a car-sharing scheme which covers participants travelling from Burghfield and Mortimer. A Transport Technical Note (Stunt Consulting, ref: B2236 TN01) was also submitted to support the application. The report concludes:

“The site is located within a rural area which precludes sustainable travel for most people. As such it is acknowledged that most people will access the site via private motorcar. However, not all will travel on their own with on site observations showing that circa 70% of trips are made alone with the remaining shared between two or more people attending the classes.

The number of trips associated with the site are considered to be low. The number is unlikely to be perceptible to anyone else travelling on the local network. The site provides allocated parking although a substantial number of overflow spaces are available if required. Therefore, no overspill parking will take place with all manoeuvring taking place well away from the public highway”.

Therefore, the proposed scheme is considered compliant with paragraph 89 of the NPPF.

Paragraph 96c of the NPPF states that planning decisions should aim to achieve ‘healthy, inclusive and safe places which promote social interaction, enabling and supporting healthy lives, through both promoting good health and preventing ill-health.... For example, through the provision of ‘..... sports facilities’. Paragraphs 98 and 98(b) of the NPPF support the provision and protection of social, recreational and community facilities which contribute to healthy and sustainable communities. The proposed development would facilitate the re-use of an existing building to provide a small-scale fitness and massage business, offering opportunities for physical activity and wellbeing services that contribute positively to community health. The proposal would therefore support the objectives of Paragraph 98 by enabling access to recreational and wellbeing facilities within the local area. Furthermore, the provision of fitness classes and therapeutic massage services would support the aims of Paragraph 98(b) by contributing to improved health and wellbeing for a range of community members.

Overall, the proposed development accords with relevant policy CP11 and is supported by the NPPF in principle subject to there being no unacceptable impacts to neighbouring amenity or impact on the character of the countryside.

Character of the Area:

The application site is located in countryside between the settlements of Swallowfield approximately 0.52 miles to the west, and Arborfield to the east. The application site forms part of a wider working rural estate which includes the established livery yard and associated equestrian infrastructure. The subject building had functioned as a

clubhouse facility serving the adjoining livery use and is already a built form within the established complex.

The building is set back from the road behind accommodation at Renewal Centre and Rowes Farmhouse. As such, there are limited views of the building from the road.

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development needs to be of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design.

The proposal would not involve any extension, alteration or enlargement of the building, and the external appearance and footprint would remain unchanged. As such, the proposal represents a re-use of an existing structure rather than new built development into the countryside. The setting of the wider site is a working rural estate. There are a number of buildings and structures associated with the estate which include equestrian buildings, arenas, menage and tracks which are surrounded by mature trees and hedgerows. The host building sits within the existing cluster of buildings and equestrian infrastructure and would continue to read as part of the wider site.

In summary, as the proposal would not result in any external changes to the existing building, it is considered that the change of use would have no detrimental impact on the character of the host building or rural setting.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Overlooking, Loss of Light & Overbearing:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development should not be of detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users. As there are no changes proposed to the form, size or scale of the existing building, there would be no impact of this nature to neighbouring amenity.

Noise:

Policy CC06 states that Proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed noise impacts to protect noise sensitive receptors.

The proposal could result in some level of noise from vehicles parking. However, the site is already in use by those using the established livery facility.

The proposed use falls within Use Class E (commercial, business and service) and would operate as a small-scale fitness and massage facility. The nature of the use is considered low-intensity, particularly given the operational details submitted (Planning Statement, ET Planning and Transport Technical Note, Stunt Consulting) which state that classes and appointments would be staggered to avoid overlap between participants, and class sizes capped, thereby limiting the number of visitors present at the site at any one time.

The application site and immediate vicinity already experience regular comings and goings associated with the established livery yard, with horse owners attending the site throughout the day to care for and exercise horses. In this context, the limited number of visitors associated with the proposed fitness and massage business would be

unlikely to materially increase activity levels beyond those already experienced at the site.

Furthermore, the proposed activities would take place entirely within the existing building, meaning that any noise generated by the use would be largely contained internally. As a result, the proposal would not be expected to give rise to significant noise disturbance to surrounding land uses. The staggered scheduling of classes and appointments would also minimise the potential for peaks in activity. It would therefore be necessary to condition this.

Taking these considerations into account, the proposal represents the appropriate re-use of an existing building within an established rural enterprise site, without resulting in additional built development, urbanising impacts, or unacceptable increases in activity levels. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with Policy CP3 and CP11 of the CS and considered acceptable.

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 and promote sustainable transport modes, as outlined in policy CP6 of the Core Strategy.

The existing access from Church Road would be retained.

WBC Highways requested additional information to demonstrate that there is capacity within the wider site to facilitate overspill parking. Revised plan 1612-PL1101B was submitted which demonstrates the required additional on-site parking can be achieved via the five allocated overspill spaces located in the parking area of the equestrian centre to the rear of the site. This is acceptable and would ensure that there would be no overspill onto the public Highway.

No information regarding cycle parking has been submitted, therefore, it will be necessary for a cycle plan condition to be attached to any grant of approval.

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 results in a change of use of the site. The use being classified as a 'less vulnerable use', as outlined in Annex 3 of the NPPF within flood zone 1.

A Flood Risk Assessment (FloodSmart Plus, ref: 97678R1) was submitted to support the application. The Council's Drainage team were consulted and raised no objection to the proposal. They concluded:

“The proposal does not involve significant new built development and is unlikely to materially increase surface water runoff. Any existing or future surface water drainage arrangements should continue to ensure that surface water is managed within the site and does not discharge onto the public highway or neighbouring land.

LLFA has no objection to the proposed development on flood risk or surface water drainage grounds”.

Ecology:

The application site is located in an area suitable for bat roosts. Bats are protected by law and thus take a priority within planning. However, in this instance, as no changes are proposed to any external surfaces of the building, a bat survey was not required to support the application.

Biodiversity Net Gain

From April 2024, a mandatory biodiversity net gain of 10% is applicable on all minor development, unless exempt. One such exemption is development that would not impact a priority habitat and would impact less than 25 sqm of on-site habitats. The applicant claims the development is exempt for this reason. As such, the proposal is not required to comply with mandatory BNG requirements.

Conclusion:

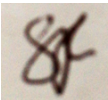
For the reasons set out above, the proposal is considered acceptable and would not conflict with the overarching aims of CS policy CP11 which dictates development in the countryside. The quality of the environment will be protected, as demonstrated throughout this report through compliance/ justification in relation to a number of material planning considerations. The application 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 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:	Yes/No/Not required

Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	6 March 2026
Earliest date for decision:	17 February 2026

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	1.4.26

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Outside settlement limits in Countryside

Flood Zone 2

Risk of Flooding from Surface Water

Bat Roost Habitat Suitability

Landscape Character Assessment 2019 - Arborfield River Terrace

Spencers Wood & Swallowfield Ward

Swallowfield Parish