

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	250554
Site Address:	Heathlands Farm, Honey Hill, Wokingham, RG40 3BG
Expiry Date:	20 May 2025
Site Visit Date:	28/04/2025
Proposal: Full application for proposed retention of timber building accommodating farm vending machine and associated gravel car parking area and fencing (retrospective).	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

- Scale and Location of Development Proposals
- Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone
- Landscape Character Assessment Area
- Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone Minor

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 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 CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment

PLANNING HISTORY

Although several planning applications have been associated with Heathlands Farm, there is no relevant planning application or appeal history directly related to the current proposal (i.e., for substantially the same development).

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Enforcement – No comments received.

WBC Highways – No objections.

WBC Landscape and Trees – Objects to the proposed development.

External

None consulted.

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Wokingham Without Parish Council - Wokingham Without Parish Council has raised concerns that the business failed to seek planning permission and requests the vending machine be removed until a traffic survey is conducted and safety standards are confirmed. The Council highlights increasing traffic pressures on the formerly rural road due to nearby developments and closures, raising safety concerns for existing users, including those accessing local schools, businesses, and attractions. Officer comment: Please refer to the 'Highway Access and Parking Provision' section within this report.
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Ward Member(s)	No comments received
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Neighbours	No comments received
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APPRAISAL

Site Description and Proposed Development:

The application site rectangular area of land located immediately off Heathland Road, along the southern side of an access road towards Heathlands Farm.

This retrospective planning application has been submitted in response to an enforcement investigation (ref: RFS/2024/089619) concerning the unauthorised works. The proposal seeks permission to retain a single-storey building housing a vending machine, along with an associated gravel parking area and enclosing close-boarded fencing.

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. 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 site is located outside of development limits, where Core Strategy Policy CP11 applies. Policy CP11 states that proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where relevant:

- 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;

According to the supporting planning statement, the proposed vending machine is directly linked to Heathlands Farm, a working agricultural business operated by HHP, and is managed by Berry Makers, a subsidiary established to sell farm-grown produce locally. The vending machine offers fresh berries and other fruit grown on-site, providing a direct-to-consumer outlet.

The vending machine, while modest in scale, contributes to farm diversification and supports the sustainability of an established rural enterprise and complies with the aims of Criterion 1 of Policy CP11.

However, the associated gravelled parking area—measuring approximately 400 sqm—is considered disproportionate to the scale and operational needs of the vending machine. The planning statement indicates an average of 20–30 transactions per day, but provides no clear assessment of vehicle movements or parking demand. Even under a worst-case scenario of 30 individual vehicle trips to the application site, the nature of the vending machine—comprising only 32 lockers—suggests that customer visits would be staggered, brief in duration, and would not result in significant parking demand at any one time.

The justification offered in the planning statement, citing peak use coinciding with drop-off and pick-up times at Little Grange Nursery to the west, is not considered relevant. The nursery has its own dedicated parking facilities, and there is no substantive evidence that school-related traffic would contribute meaningfully to demand for the vending machine. Moreover, no transport statement or parking strategy has been provided to support the scale of the proposed parking area. In the absence of such evidence, the extent of hardstanding is considered excessive and harms the character and appearance of the countryside.

In respect of Criterion 2, there is clear conflict. There are no original or pre-existing buildings within the application site. Historical aerial imagery (August 2023) shows that the land was previously undeveloped—largely vegetated and informal in appearance, with a rutted access track but no formalised surface. Since then, a substantial area (approximately 400 sqm) has been cleared and laid with gravel, forming a new hardstanding extending for approximately 23 metres in length.



Figure 1 – Comparison between Google satellite imagery of the application site (August 2023, left) and the proposed development as illustrated in the submitted block plan (right).

As illustrated in Figure 1 above, the gravelled area extends further towards the outer edges of the site, encroaching into land that was previously vegetated and undeveloped. The introduction of engineered surfacing and formalised parking in this context constitutes a clear encroachment and expansion of built development into the open countryside, contrary to Criterion 2 of Policy CP11.

The new road access has resulted in loss of a section of hedgerow that fronted the road and contributed to the countryside character and appearance of the area. In addition, the close boarded timber fencing surrounding the site also contributes to the uncharacteristic and urbanising appearance of the site. These negative impacts also contribute to the excess expansion of this parcel of land.

In conclusion the scale and extent of associated development results in an excessive and unnecessary encroachment into undeveloped countryside that detrimentally impacts the rural character and appearance of the area. The proposed development fails to satisfy the overarching principles of Policy CP11 for development outside of settlement limits. This impact is also discussed in the following section.

Character of the Area:

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for

development proposals that ‘maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment’.

Policy CP3 states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that ‘are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area’ and ‘contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings (especially existing dwellings) including the use of appropriate landscaping’.

Policy TB21 of the MDD Local Plan states proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council’s Landscape Character Assessment.

The site is located on the western edge of the Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland, which is identified as being of moderate sensitivity in the Council’s Landscape Character Assessment. As part of the landscape strategy for this area, the guidance seeks to: *‘Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries, hedgerows and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for Wokingham and Winnersh’* and *‘Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of new development on valuable attributes.’*

The immediate area is semi-rural in character, with several commercial businesses located nearby, some of which feature associated access points and signage visible from the street. Nonetheless, the wider setting has largely retained an informal and verdant character. This is due in part to the presence of a dense belt of tall, mature trees and scattered hedgerows and shrubs that line Heathlands Road and the access track to the north of the application site. These natural features contribute significantly to the area’s green and rural appearance, helping to soften the visual impact of nearby development and maintain a sense of countryside character despite the presence of commercial activity.

As shown in Figures 1 and 2 the application site was previously undeveloped and predominantly vegetated, containing an unpaved access track but no formal surfacing. However, as detailed later in this report by the Council’s Trees and Landscape Officer, the proposed works have led to the removal of trees within the interior of the site to accommodate a gravelled hardstanding, extending approximately 23 metres in length and covering an area of around 400 square metres. Additionally, the new 9 metre wide access point from Farm Road has resulted in the loss of mature hedgerow. This represents a marked physical and visual transformation of the site from an informal, mostly green space into one that is engineered, functional, and clearly domestic in nature.



Figure 2 – Google street view imagery taken September 2023 showing the north boundary of the application site prior to the proposed works.



Figure 3 – Google street view imagery taken September 2024 showing the north boundary of the application site following the completion of the proposed works.

Although the new gravel hard standing is a ground-level it introduces a formalised, urbanised treatment that contrasts sharply with the surrounding landscape and this is clearly visible from the public realm. The change is more than cosmetic - it represents a shift in land use character, undermining the site's contribution to the rural setting and introducing an intensity of use that did not previously exist.

This impact is further exacerbated by the site's visibility within the wider landscape context. The removal of hedgerows to facilitate the new access has opened up clear views into the site, making the hardstanding and close-boarded fencing readily visible from the public realm. With only a low wire fence installed along the western boundary, any meaningful visual screening of the proposed development is now heavily dependent on adjacent vegetation located outside the application site's red

line boundary—vegetation that cannot be guaranteed or maintained through planning control.



Figure 4 – Google street view taken September 2024 showing the application site from Heathlands Road following the completion of the proposed works.

Street View imagery from September 2024 further illustrates that the site is perceptible from Heathlands Road, particularly during periods when surrounding trees are not in leaf. When viewed in this context - comprising a small single-storey building alongside a disproportionately large, gravelled area and boundary fencing - the development reads as an isolated and incoherent feature, more akin to a disused or detached car park than a well-integrated rural facility.

In summary, the proposal has introduced a formalised, engineered intervention that fails to respond to the informal, vegetated character of the surrounding area. It does not integrate sensitively with its setting, nor does it enhance or maintain environmental quality and is detrimental to the sites valued landscape character and sense of place. The development is contrary to policy CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy, CC01, CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, the council's Character Landscape Assessment and Section 12 and 15 of the NPPF.

Neighbouring Amenity:

The proposed development is suitably located away from neighbouring properties, ensuring it does not result in overlooking, loss of light, or overbearing impacts.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

The Council's Highways Officer has reviewed this application and notes that proposed outbuilding and fencing will be set back from the public highway, no impacts on the public highways and the visibility splays are expected.

Wokingham Without Parish Council has raised concerns about the safety implications of the vending machine, citing increased traffic pressures from nearby developments like the Grays Farm sports pitches. They fear that even a small-scale operation could

worsen existing safety issues.

However, the Case Officer believes that the vending machine would not generate significant traffic movements, as it is intended for local customers with minimal parking demand. Given the modest nature of the operation, it is unlikely to exacerbate traffic issues or create safety concerns, and therefore, no additional traffic survey is considered necessary

Landscape and Trees:

The site is on the edge of the Forest and Rides Valued landscape – and is influenced by it, specifically the woodland setting which is clear around the site such that the canopies appear to almost cover it when looking at overhead mapping. Trees are a valued landscape attribute of Landscape Character Area N1 ‘Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland’

Scattered mixed and broadleaved woodland, including ancient woodland, and small wetland areas which provide valued ecological habitats including BAP priority habitats.

There are many protected and potential veteran trees lining Heathlands Road adjacent to the site.

The Council’s Trees and Landscape Officer has reviewed this application and notes that photos from a recent site visit appear to show the removal of trees within the site interior to formalise the space for parking to access the vending machine, If the application had been applied for in the usual way, a Tree Survey would have shown any conflict with the development proposed and mitigation may have been used to enable development subject to other checks.

As it stands, the development — which may have involved the thinning of tree cover and includes no mitigation is contrary to Policy CC03 ii) (d) as it fails to protect and retain existing trees and vegetation. Accordingly, an objection is raised on arboricultural grounds.

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:	Refuse and Enforce
Date:	6 May 2025
Earliest date for decision:	15 April 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>MC</i>
Date:	20.05.2025