

PLANNING REF : 261695
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 15 Hart Dyke Close
: Wokingham, Berkshire
: RG41 2HQ
SUBMITTED BY : Mrs Victoria Robson
DATE SUBMITTED : 02/09/2026

COMMENTS:

Previous Appeal Decision and Continuing Importance of the Site

The significance of this site has already been considered in detail through a previous planning appeal, which was the subject of a public inquiry and subsequent site inspection. The resulting decision, APP/X0360/W/19/3235572, was dismissed on 25 August 2020. The findings of that appeal remain highly relevant to the consideration of the current proposal and should not be disregarded simply because the nature of the development now proposed is different.

In determining the previous application, Wokingham Borough Council identified significant concerns regarding the encroachment of development into the countryside, the resulting harm to the character and appearance of the landscape, and the importance of maintaining the separation between Wokingham and Finchampstead.

The Planning Inspector subsequently recognised the contribution made by the site to the open countryside and the rural setting of Wokingham. Importantly, the Inspector considered that development in this location would introduce a more urban character into the countryside and would adversely affect the established character and appearance of the area.

Those conclusions remain material today. Although the current proposal is for sporting use rather than residential development, the introduction of engineered pitches, substantial fencing, acoustic barriers, netting and associated infrastructure would nevertheless represent a significant change to the character and appearance of this currently open land populated by bats, slow worms, grass snakes, deer, ground nesting birds and many other species not mentioned within the application.

Sports Pitches and Safety

There are also substantial concerns regarding whether the proposed sports facilities have been properly designed for safe and practical use within the available site.

The comments provided by the ECB are particularly relevant. While the ECB recognises the general benefit of new sporting facilities, its response does not amount to an unqualified endorsement of the proposal. Indeed, the ECB expressly states:

"Therefore, before the ECB can fully support, a revised pitch layout is required taking the above into consideration."

This is an important qualification. The application should therefore not be presented as having received full support from the ECB when the ECB has identified matters that require the pitch layout to be revised before it can provide that support.

The Council should require the applicant to demonstrate that the revised arrangement provides adequate space, appropriate orientation and sufficient safety margins for the intended level of play.

Drainage and Flood Risk

The drainage information provided with the application also appears insufficient to demonstrate that the development can be accommodated without increasing surface-water and flood risk.

This is particularly concerning given the existing conditions on the site and the history of waterlogging and flooding in the surrounding area. The potential consequences for neighbouring properties are significant and warrant a robust, site-specific assessment rather than reliance upon assumptions regarding proposed drainage infrastructure.

There is an additional concern that the applicant has previously ressed concerns about increased flood risk associated with development of this land. The Council should therefore carefully consider whether the current proposal has genuinely demonstrated that the risk can be contained and managed without transferring additional flood risk to neighbouring properties.

Claimed Community Benefit

I am also unconvinced by the suggestion that the proposal will provide a meaningful community benefit.

The proposed facilities are essentially grass sports pitches located within the grounds of a private boarding school. Access to the site would be controlled through the school rather than being available as an ordinary public recreational facility, and there appears to be no significant supporting community infrastructure associated with the proposal.

In these circumstances, any claimed community benefit should be clearly defined, quantified and secured through an appropriate mechanism. General assertions that the pitches may be available for community use should not be afforded significant weight unless the extent, frequency and nature of that use are clearly established. Or, the application should state the site is for private use, by the private application who own the site.

Furthermore, if community use is proposed, the Council should consider the additional traffic, noise, lighting, hours of operation and activity that would result.

Acoustic Barrier

The proposed acoustic barrier is another particularly significant concern.

A structure of approximately 3.5 metres in height would be an exceptionally substantial intervention in this location, with no obvious local precedent for a structure of comparable scale and purpose.

Its impact would extend beyond its visual appearance. The

construction of the barrier has the potential to affect existing trees, hedgerows and their root systems, while the physical presence of such a substantial structure may also interfere with established wildlife movement through the site.

For neighbouring residents, the barrier would fundamentally alter the existing relationship between their properties and the open field. Rather than retaining an open outlook towards the countryside, residents would be faced with a large, engineered structure immediately adjoining or close to their gardens.

The cumulative effects of height, mass, proximity and associated sporting activity therefore need to be properly assessed as part of the planning balance.

Cricket Ball Safety and Residential Properties

There also appears to be insufficient consideration of the risk posed by cricket balls leaving the playing area.

The proposed cricket use is understood to be at a high level, given the nature of the school and the standard of sporting provision being proposed. Consequently, balls may be struck at considerable speed and over substantial distances.

There must therefore be a properly considered safety buffer between the playing area and neighbouring residential gardens.

Without suitable mitigation, residents should not be expected to accept a situation where the ordinary use of their gardens becomes subject to a foreseeable risk of cricket-ball strikes whenever matches or training sessions are taking place.

This is both a residential amenity and public safety consideration and should be addressed explicitly within the application.

Need for Further Evidence

Given the number and significance of the issues identified, I do not believe that the current submission provides the Council with sufficient evidence to properly assess the proposal.

Before the application can reasonably be supported, the applicant should provide robust, site-specific evidence addressing:

the impact upon the established landscape character and appearance;
the consequences of introducing development and infrastructure into the countryside;

the continued importance of the settlement gap between Wokingham and Finchampstead;

the design, dimensions, orientation and safety of the proposed sports pitches;

compliance with relevant sports governing-body guidance;
the risk of cricket balls entering neighbouring properties;

operational noise, including the nature, frequency and duration of

sporting activity;
the proposed hours of use;
lighting and any associated impacts;
surface-water drainage and the potential for increased flood risk;
the capacity and reliability of proposed drainage infrastructure;

the extent and enforceability of any claimed community use;
traffic generated by any community or additional sporting use;
impacts upon ecology and wildlife movement;
impacts upon existing trees and hedgerows;
the construction and visual impact of the proposed acoustic barrier;
and
the cumulative effect of all of these matters upon neighbouring residents and the wider landscape.

These matters should be considered cumulatively rather than in isolation. A development which might have an acceptable impact in one respect can nevertheless become unacceptable when the effects of noise, lighting, fencing, visual intrusion, ecological damage, flood risk and increased activity are considered together.

In light of the previous appeal decision, the acknowledged importance of this land to the rural setting of Wokingham, the unresolved concerns identified by the ECB, the inadequate demonstration of drainage and flood-risk mitigation, and the substantial impacts associated with the proposed acoustic barrier and sporting use, I do not consider that the application has demonstrated compliance with the relevant development plan policies.

In the absence of compelling additional evidence and appropriate mitigation, I respectfully request that planning application 261695 be refused.