

8th September 2025

Delivered via the Planning Portal

Development Management
Wokingham Borough Council
Civic Offices
Shute End
Wokingham
RG40 1BN

Ref: 03521

Dear Sir / Madam,

SUBMISSION OF PRIOR APPROVAL NOTIFICATION: INSTALLATION OF SOLAR CANOPIES ON NON-DOMESTIC, OFF STREET PARKING, MEREOAK PARK AND RIDE, MEREOAK LANE, THREE MILE CROSS, RG7 1PB

PLANNING PORTAL REF. PP-14110528

On behalf of our clients, Vital Energi, we are pleased to submit a Prior Approval Notification in respect of the proposed installation of solar canopies above the existing MereOak Park and Ride, submitted pursuant to Permitted Development as detailed within Class OA, Part 14 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).

SITE CONTEXT

MereOak Park and Ride (hereafter referred to as 'MereOak P&R'/'the site') is located south of the intersection of the A33 Basingstoke Road and Junction 11 of the M4 and provides good connectivity for people visiting the area from the south of Reading from both the A33 and M4.

The site is landscaped on all sides, with mature tree and hedgerow vegetation helping screen the site from the A33 to the east, MereOak Lane to the south and west, with agricultural pastureland located beyond the screening to the north of the site. The site is surrounded by further agricultural fields beyond its existing boundaries to the north, south and west. Immediately south of the site is the MereOak Lane roundabout which provides access onto the A33.

Further beyond the A33 to the east lies a dense tree belt beyond which lies the South of M4 SDL comprising a strategic residential development, petrol station, public open space, public house and leisure facilities.

The site forms part of an existing allocation within Core Strategy Policy CP19 – South of M4 SDL' which makes provision for a Park and Ride facility in the vicinity of M4 Junction 11. This has clearly been delivered in accordance with that policy, with full planning permission granted in 2013 under application ref. 131356 for the proposed construction of a new park and ride facility providing approximately 600 bays, terminal building, together with blue badge holder, cycle and motorcycle parking. The site became operational in August 2015 and has operated continually and successfully during this time.

The Pinnacle
20 Tudor Road
Reading
RG1 1NH
T 0118 902 2830 turley.co.uk

A non-material amendment (NMA) was granted in 2016 (ref.161470) to facilitate the use of the site for National Express Services, alongside the P&R services already established. The NMA also sought to remove the terminal building from the plan and the established use of the site for 24hour purposes to facilitate National Express movements. It was noted in the Officer Report to ref. 161470 at paragraph 3.1 that the terminus building was not necessary for the safe and continued operation of the site, and that the site was developed with the scope to accommodate regional coaches at the time of the original permission in a manner that would not prejudice the existing operations of the park and ride facility.

Paragraph 3.3 of the Officer report noted that the site itself *“is reasonable distant from surrounding neighbouring residential properties”* and that the operation of the site on a 24hr basis would cause negligible impact upon privacy and amenity of residential properties in the area. Permission was accordingly granted.

Running Monday to Saturday, the MereOak Park and Ride 600 service provides a fast and frequent connection to central Reading up to every 15 minutes during the day. On Sundays the MereOak Park and Ride 650 route provides an hourly service between central Reading and MereOak via Green Park helping ease congestion on the local highways network. In addition, Park & Ride 300 service links the Royal Berkshire Hospital with the MereOak and Thames Valley Park & Ride site via Christchurch Green for the University of Reading.

PROPOSAL

This Prior Approval Notification is submitted in respect of the following description of development:

“Application to determine if prior approval is required for the installation of solar panel canopy over existing Park and Ride.”

Full details of the PV array are submitted as part of the supporting information for the application; however the below table sets out a summary of the PV and canopies.

	PV	Canopy
Width	1.13m	2.5m
Height	1.96m	Max 4.0m
Depth V Frame (Single)	0.03m	5.44m
Depth DuoPitch (Double)	0.03m	
Frame width	0.03m	N/A

The proposed canopy would utilise a V Frame and DuoPitch type which provide benefits such as allowing parking bays to be orientated in any direction and still achieve good performance. Materials for the canopy would consist of Galvanised Steel.

PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT LEGISLATION

The application has been submitted to determine whether prior approval is required in accordance with Schedule 2, Part 14, Class OA of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended). No other matters can be considered, as reinforced by the national Planning Practice Guidance:

“The matters for prior approval vary depending on the type of development and these are set out in full in the relevant Parts in Schedule 2 to the General Permitted Development Order. A local planning authority cannot consider any other matters when determining a prior approval application.”

(Paragraph: 026 Reference ID: 13-026-20140306)

As a result, the policies of the Development Plan are not applicable to the application. An assessment is provided against each of the criterion in Class OA (as amended) below:

OA.1. Development is not permitted by Class OA—

(a) if any part of the development—

(i) exceeds 4 metres in height above ground level;

The proposed canopy would have a maximum height of 4.0m above ground level.

(ii) is within 10 metres of the curtilage of a dwellinghouse or a block of flats;

The development would not be within 10 metres of the curtilage of a dwellinghouse or a block of flats. The nearest dwellings to the site are located on the eastern side of the A33 Tabby Drive at a distance of approximately 100m, with the development c. 325 south of the East Sussex Mobile Homes.

(b) within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse or a block of flats;

The development would not be within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse or a block of flats. The development would be sited within the existing Park and Ride boundaries, well screened from the nearest dwelling house or block of flats.

(c) on a site designated as a scheduled monument or on land within the curtilage of a scheduled monument;

The site is not designated as a scheduled monument or on land within the curtilage of a scheduled monument and therefore this criteria does not apply.

(d) within the curtilage of a listed building;

The site does not fall within the curtilage of a listed building and therefore this criteria does not apply.

(e) for the display of an advertisement; or

The solar canopy is not proposed for the display of an advertisement.

(f) if the off-street parking area is in use by virtue of Class B (temporary use of land) of Part 4 (temporary buildings and uses).

The site is not in use by virtue of Class B (temporary use of land) of Part 4(temporary buildings and uses). The site is allocated for such uses within the adopted Wokingham Core Strategy.

Full planning permission was granted in 2013 under application reference 131356 for the proposed construction of a new park and ride facility providing approximately 600 bays: terminal building together with blue badge holder, cycle and motorcycle parking and has been operation since August 2015. A review of the decision notice does not make reference to any temporary period.

Conditions

OA.2.—(1) Development is permitted by Class OA subject to the following conditions.

(2) In the case of development above a permeable surface, provision is made to direct run-off water from the solar canopy to a permeable or porous area or surface within the off-street parking area.

The site comprises ‘made-ground’ comprising hard standing with vehicle bays demarcated accordingly. There is incidental ‘ornamental landscaping’ to break up the hard-standing that serves as an extremely limited permeable surface. The site is located within Flood Zone 1, the lowest category of flood risk, with areas along the site boundaries identified as being at risk of surface water flooding (Flood Zone 2) whereby they run along the existing drain network.

The proposed canopy frame has been designed to channel water flows in a safe and efficient manner that prevents ‘pooling’ within the frame and underneath. This will allow for the existing drainage arrangements to continue, in running a positive drainage system that discharges into the two existing ditches running along the boundaries of the site as confirmed within the ‘Surface Water Drainage Strategy (PBA, 2013) approved during the original application.

(3) Before beginning development, the developer must apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the local planning authority will be required with respect to—

(a)the solar canopy’s siting, design and external appearance, in particular the impact of glare on the occupiers of neighbouring premises; and

It is recognised that the proposed solar canopies would be additional structures on site, however, these would be seen in the context of existing hard standing and street paraphernalia (bus shelters, street lighting, bollards etc) associated with the established use of the site for car parking.

The site is not within a designated landscape area.as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework. There is dense tree planting around the perimeter of the site which encloses and screens the site from wider views. Visibility of the canopies in wider views would therefore be limited, and where the canopies might be visible would not appear out of keeping with the prevailing character and use of the park and ride site. It is likely potential views of the development would be experienced at close range and most likely to be motorists moving at speed or queuing on the A33 Basingstoke Road. However the height of the frame and shallow angle would not result in glare impact on the neighbouring properties, that are at closest c. 100m to the east of the site with intervening vegetation.

The proposed development would be compatible with, and would not lead to any material change in impacts compared to, the existing use as a Park and Ride site. The proposals would not result in harm to the amenity of neighbouring residential uses.

It is acknowledged that the site is adjacent to the A33, however given the height of the canopies in relation to the A33 to the east, related existing landscaping, and the fact that the solar array will in any event be near horizontal, there is no glint and glare issue that would affect highway safety. Similarly, given the site's distance from the M4 it is not considered that the proposed development would have an impact on highway safety here.

As such, it is not considered that the siting, design or external appearance of the canopy would have a significantly detrimental impact on the surrounding character and appearance of the area, or visual amenity.

(b) in the case of a solar canopy on article 2(3) land, the impact of the appearance of the solar canopy on that land.

Article (2)3 land is defined by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended), Schedule 1, Part 1 as land falling within:

a) an area designated as a conservation area under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (designation of conservation areas);

b) an area of outstanding natural beauty;

c) an area specified by the Secretary of State for the purposes of section 41(3) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (enhancement and protection of the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside);

d) the Broads;

e) a National Park; and

f) a World Heritage Site.

The site does not sit within one of these areas and therefore this condition does not apply.

(4) Paragraphs J.4(3) to J.4(12) of this Part apply in relation to an application under sub-paragraph (3) as if "Class OA" substitutes the reference to "Class J" in paragraph J.4(4).

The proposed development would comply with Paragraphs J.4(3) to J.4(12) regarding details of the application submitted to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the authority will be required as to the design or external appearance of the development.

The requisite material and information is provided within this submission and supporting material outlined within this covering letter.

(5) Development must be completed within a period of 3 years starting with the date on which —

(a) prior approval is given; or

(b) a determination that such approval is not required is given or the period for giving such a determination set out in paragraph J.4(9)(c) of this Part has expired without the applicant being notified whether prior approval is required, given or refused.

The proposed development would be completed within 3 years should prior approval be required and granted, or per paragraph J.4(9)© should prior approval not be required.

(6) Where the solar canopy is no longer needed, it is removed as soon as reasonably practicable and the land is restored to its condition before the development took place so far as reasonably practicable.

The canopy would be removed as soon as reasonably practicable when no longer needed, and the land would remain in the existing Park and Ride use as consented by application reference ref. 131356 (and requisite changes made via NMA application ref. 161470.

DISCUSSION

This proposal directly aligns with Wokingham Borough Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) published in September 2024, in allowing the Council to produce its own renewable energy generation across the Borough and reduce the overall requirement and composition of fossil fuel provision. In this context, the provision of solar car ports at MereOak Park and Ride will allow the council to offset its carbon emissions from electricity and gas usage and possibly 'retail' any excess.

The site is identified as 'Site 3' within the adopted CEAP, with the Council identifying the opportunity to erect solar canopies above the existing Park and Ride facility at MereOak in its Committee Report to the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2025.

As demonstrated above, the proposal complies with the requisite criteria outlined within Class OA permitted development for the erection of a solar canopy on non-domestic, off-street parking. It is acknowledged that the submitted plans show provision for the erection of a substation in the north western corner of the site. The erection of a substation does not form part of this prior approval submission and is not permitted under Class OA Permitted Development outlined above.

It is intended that the Local Authority will exercise its powers granted under Part 12 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 to facilitate the provision of a substation through a separate application. For ease, Part 12 Class A makes provision for:

A. The erection or construction and the maintenance, improvement or other alteration by, or on behalf of, a local authority or by, or on behalf of, an urban development corporation of:

(a) any small ancillary building, works or equipment on land belonging to or maintained by them required for the purposes of any function exercised by them on that land otherwise than as statutory undertakers.

It is noted that the reference in Class A to any small ancillary building, works or equipment is a reference to any ancillary building, works or equipment not exceeding 4 metres in height or 200 cubic metres in capacity.

SUMMARY

As demonstrated above, the proposed development would comply with the relevant requirements of Class OA and is able to qualify for the permitted development rights set out in respect of this class, and therefore Prior Approval is not required in this instance.

INFORMATION SUBMITTED

This planning application is submitted via the Planning Portal under reference PP-14110528 and is accompanied by the following documents and plans:

- Application Form
- Covering Letter (ref. 03521)
- Solar Panel Specification (Vertex S TSM-XXXNEG18RC.27)
- Location Plan (ref. 50901-VE-SW-00-DR-M-5001_P1)
- Existing Site Plan (ref. 50901-VE-SW-00-DR-M-5002_P1)
- Proposed Site Plan (ref. 50901-VE-SW-00-DR-M-5003_P1)
- Existing Elevations (ref. 50901-VE-SW-XX-E-M-5001_P1)
- Proposed Elevations (ref. 50901-VE-SW-XX-E-M-5002_P1)

The application fee has been paid via the Planning Portal. We look forward to your confirmation of registration of the application shortly.

Should you wish to discuss the application, or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleague Emma Sibley (emma.sibley@turley.co.uk).

Yours sincerely,

Peter Davis

Senior Planner

peter.davis@turley.co.uk