

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	261498
Site Address:	Sonning House, Pearson Road, Sonning, Wokingham, RG4 6UL
Expiry Date:	8 September 2026
Site Visit Date:	17 July 2026
Proposal: Householder application for the proposed erection of a single storey rear extension and a first floor rear extension, addition of 3 no. dormer windows, a balcony and external staircase, a pitched roof over the existing garage, changes to fenestration and modifications to roof plus new front railings and gate and associated landscaping to facilitate conversion of Sonning House and Weavers Cottage into one single dwelling, following removal of the existing single storey side lobby, rear bay window and front boundary wall; installation of a swimming pool and erection of an associated pool house.	

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 CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals
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 TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets TB25 – Archaeology
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU) (N.B. the LPU is deemed to overall hold limited weight at this time).	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS4 – Development within or adjacent to minor settlements CE3 – Environmental standards for residential development C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity

	DH5 – The historic environment
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sonning Parish Design Statement Sonning Design Appraisal

PLANNING HISTORY		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
230238 & 230239 (LBC) (Not implemented)	Proposed erection of a single storey rear extension and a first floor rear extension, addition of 3 no. dormer windows, a balcony and external staircase, a pitched roof over the existing garage, changes to fenestration and modifications to roof plus new front railings and gate and associated landscaping to facilitate conversion of Sonning House and Weavers Cottage into one single dwelling, following removal of the existing single storey side lobby, rear bay window and front boundary wall; installation of a swimming pool and erection of an associated pool house.	C/A – 22/09/2023
F/2009/0971 & LB/2009/0972	Proposed erection of single storey rear extension to provide patio store, addition of roof light to existing single storey rear TV room and alterations to a window and external doors.	Conditionally Approved – 29.06.2009
F/2009/0095 & LB/2009/0098	Proposed erection of single storey rear extension to provide patio store, addition of roof lantern light to existing single storey rear TV room plus construction of boiler housing.	Refused – 16.03.2009
2074/72	Erection of residence to enclose courtyard.	Conditionally Approved – 21.12.1972
1372/71	Conversion into two dwellings.	Conditionally Approved – 30.12.1971

CONSULTATION RESPONSES
Internal
WBC Landscape and Trees: No objection subject to conditions WBC Built Heritage Officer: No objection subject to conditions WBC CIL: Advice regarding CIL matters WBC Ecology Newts: No objection WBC Ecology: No objection subject to conditions
External
Berkshire Archaeology: No objection subject to informative

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Sonning Parish Council have no objection to the proposal but raise the following concerns: 1) Loss of an affordable dwelling as a result of the proposed conversion. <i>Officer's Note: This is discussed in the 'Principle of Development' section of the report.</i> 2) Importance of obtaining a bat licence prior to any development. <i>Officer's Note: This is discussed in the 'Ecology' section of the report.</i> 3) <i>Potential loss of light impact from proposed pitched roof over the existing garage. Officer's Note: This is discussed in the 'Neighbouring Amenity' section of the report.</i> 4) Potential access issues for deliveries, storage etc. to the rear of the property during construction. <i>Officer's Note: While this could be a material planning consideration, the proposed works are not so significant as to warrant imposition of a Construction Method Statement condition. Any adverse noise/disturbance during the works could be reported to the Council's Environmental Health team.</i>
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The site is a three storey Grade II Listed dwellinghouse within Sonning Conservation Area which benefits from previous alterations and additions. The dwelling is of later 18th Century origin, with extensions later added on in the late 19th Century, the 1930s and the 1970s. The 1970s two storey extension is currently a separate dwellinghouse known as Weavers Cottage, the proposal would return the building into a single detached dwellinghouse.

The original building is very prominent on the street scene largely due to its three storey nature. However, it visually ties in with the other red brick buildings on Pearson Road and contributes significantly to the heritage character of the area. The rear is not visible from the street scene, where the existing additions have created a visually complicated roof form.

Access and parking are shared with the adjacent property Suna Court in the forecourt to the west of the building. Within this courtyard is a flat roof garage which is slightly at odds with the street scene. The existing boundary wall and railings are low with an open entry to the courtyard, allowing views of the listed building when traversing the street scene.

Proposal:

The proposed alterations and additions to the main building comprise the erection of a part single part two storey rear extension with 3no. dormer windows, a balcony and external staircase plus roof modifications, fenestration changes and internal alterations to facilitate the conversion of Sonning House and Weavers Cottage into one single dwelling following demolition of the existing single storey side lobby and rear bay window.

This application also proposes the erection of a pitched roof over the existing detached garage, enclosing the forecourt by raising the front boundary wall and installing vehicular gates, the installation of a swimming pool and erection of a pool house in the rear garden as well as associated landscaping to the front and rear including the creation of a new courtyard fronting Weavers Cottage.

The works proposed are identical to those approved under extant permission ref. 230238, which has not yet been implemented. That permission expires in September 2026 and is subject to several pre-commencement conditions requiring further details to be submitted. As at the date of this report, those conditions have not been discharged. It is understood that this application, together with the associated Listed Building Consent application ref. 261499, has been submitted to provide additional time to implement the scheme.

Permission 230238 remains capable of implementation until 22 September 2026. The applicant's submission of this materially identical application indicates a continuing intention to undertake the scheme. The extant permission is therefore a material fallback to which significant weight is afforded. This weight is justified because the permission remains capable of lawful implementation, the current proposal is materially identical to the approved scheme, and the applicant has actively sought a further permission before expiry. The approved and submitted drawings have been compared and there are no material differences between them.

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.

Alterations and additions to an existing residential dwelling within settlement limits is acceptable in principle, subject to impact on other material considerations including the character of the area, heritage assets and neighbouring amenity being acceptable.

The extant permission (ref 230238) has already established the principle of reverting the existing development to a single dwellinghouse. The site was originally one residential property that was later converted into a pair of residential dwellings by installing internal walls in between the listed building (Sonning House) and the 1970s

side extension (now Weavers Cottage). Weavers Cottage has remained within the ownership of Sonning House and is leased by the landowners to tenants.

Reverting to a single, large dwelling would consolidate the site back to its original planning unit and simplify the existing layout. The proposal also includes works to the external fabric of the listed building. The heritage merits of those works are assessed separately below.

Whilst the loss of 1no. dwelling weighs negatively in the planning balance, this is given limited weight in the planning balance due to the history of the site originally being one property as well as other material considerations set out throughout this report. No evidence has been submitted or identified to demonstrate that Weavers Cottage is secured as affordable housing in planning terms. The Parish Council's concern is therefore treated as relating to the loss of one market dwelling contrary to Core Strategy policy CP3. The proposal would nevertheless retain residential use of the site and the limited conflict arising from the loss of a single market dwelling is not considered sufficient, either alone or in combination with other matters, to outweigh the benefits and neutral impacts identified elsewhere in this assessment.

Design and Character of the Area:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale, mass, layout, built form, height and character of the area and must be of high quality design. R1 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that development contribute positively towards and be compatible with the historic or underlying character and quality of the local area.

R23 of the Borough Design Guide SPD states that alterations or extensions should be clearly subservient to the form and scale of the original building in most situations, with a complementary design which either adopts the existing style or by a carefully considered contrast. The key considerations for all proposed additions to residential dwellings are they should be well designed, respond positively to the original dwelling, contribute positively to the local character and relate well to neighbouring properties.

The design of the proposed development is identical to the extant permission (ref 230238). The most significant proposed change to the building is the rear extensions which would alter and add to the later additions to the building rather than a direct extension to the original building. The proposal would result in a more uniform roof at both ground and first floor level and respond positively to the original building while the raised ridge heights are fairly modest and would not encroach the eaves height of the main three storey building.

At ground floor level, the extension is relatively modest in size and scale and would effectively 'square off' the existing additions and would not encroach the existing rear building line. The first floor rear extension would also effectively 'square off' the existing addition while the proposed dormer windows are well proportioned and would relate well with the existing roof forms at the rear. Moreover, all proposed external materials would be in keeping with the existing dwelling with the black metal external staircase and balcony an acceptable material choice which would not detract from the

redbrick. Therefore, the proposed extensions to the building are well designed and would not detract from the appearance of the original building or the character of the area.

There is a degree of variety with boundary treatments fronting Pearson Road with some examples of high boundary red brick walls but predominately comprising open frontages or low walls. The proposed boundary treatment fronting the forecourt would have a total height of approximately 1.65 metres. While this a significant difference from the existing low boundary wall, the new wall and gates would comprise of metal railings above 0.65 metres, with exception of the 2 pillars, which would sufficiently retain the permeability of the existing boundary treatment while supporting the applicant's goal of improving privacy. Therefore, the proposed boundary treatment would not adversely detract from the character of the site or be out of character with the wider area.

The existing side entrance is a minor addition to the listed building which is set well back from the street. Therefore, its removal would not have an adverse visual impact on the appearance of the original building or the street scene. The proposed refurbishment of the detached garage and the subsequent raising of the roof would improve the building's contribution to the street scene by replacing the existing flat roof form of a poor visual quality with a more appropriate hipped roof.

The proposed pool house at the rear would have a total ridge height of approximately 4.05 metres, width of 7 metres and depth of 4 metres. Aerial images show that there are outbuildings located in the rear gardens of several neighbouring properties within the village. Subsequently the proposed building forms part of the character of the area. Due to the significant depth of the rear amenity space serving Sonning House, the proposal would not be synonymous with overdevelopment while its design would complement the works to the main building. The proposed swimming pool is of a relatively modest size, is set well back from the main dwelling and would therefore have a neutral impact on the character of the area.

Overall, the proposal is well designed and comprises several notable improvements to the appearance and form of the existing dwelling and the site's frontage, with new additions of an appropriate scale. It would therefore not introduce any adverse harm to the visual amenity of the street scene or wider character of the area. A condition which requires further details on various aspects of the proposal including the new boundary treatment and pool house is recommended to ensure that all proposed external materials are acceptable.

Impact on Designated Heritage Assets:

In determining this planning application, the Council must have special regard under section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to the desirability of preserving the listed building, its setting and features of special architectural or historic interest. It must also pay special attention under section 72(1) to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Sonning Conservation Area. The associated listed building consent application is additionally subject to section 16(2).

Policy HE6 of the NPPF (2026) states that when considering the potential effect of a development proposal on the significance of a designated heritage asset, substantial weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Policy TB24 of the MDD Local Plan outlines that the Council will conserve and seek to enhance the designated heritage assets in the Borough and their settings by supporting development proposals that will conserve the local character, setting, management and historic significance of designated heritage assets.

The application site is Grade II Listed and located in the heart of Sonning Conservation Area. As discussed, the majority of the proposed external works would largely alter the later additions to the original three storey building. However, works to the original building comprise internal layout changes, fenestration changes and the removal of a side entrance. The Council's Built Heritage Officer has reviewed the proposal and raised no objection on the basis that the submission is identical to the scheme approved under the extant permission.

In assessing the previous application, the Officer concluded that the proposal would not have a harmful impact on the late 18th Century and 19th Century components of the building, which are of key historic and architectural significance to Sonning, while the proposed changes to the garage and front boundary would enhance the setting of the listed building and character and appearance of the conservation area.

The principal significance of the listed building derives from its late-18th-century three-storey form, later 19th-century fabric and its architectural and townscape contribution to Pearson Road and the Sonning Conservation Area. The rear works principally affect later additions and rationalise the existing complex roof form without competing with the height or form of the principal building. Subject to further details being secured via condition, the garage roof and permeable railings and gates would improve the immediate setting, while the proposed detailed controls would safeguard materials, joinery and surviving historic fabric.

Having regard to the nature and location of the works, significant elements of the listed building's special interest would be retained. The identified enhancements to the garage, forecourt enclosure and wider setting reinforce the conclusion that the proposal would preserve the significance of the Grade II listed building and preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Sonning Conservation Area.

Several conditions are recommended to ensure that no additional works are carried out which could have a harmful impact on the listed building, and so final details on elements of the works including the front boundary treatment can be agreed before they are carried out. These conditions have been agreed with the applicant.

The decision-maker has applied considerable importance and weight to those statutory preservation duties. Overall, the proposal would preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building and would preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area in accordance with MDD Local Plan policy TB24 and policy HE6 of the NPPF.

Archaeology:

Policy TB25 of the MDD Local Plan states that where development is likely to affect an area of high archaeological potential or an area which is likely to contain archaeological remains, the presumption is that appropriate measures shall be taken to protect remains by preservation in situ.

The application site does not fall within an identified area of high archaeological potential. However, it is located in close proximity to early Medieval Sonning including a 7th century religious foundation. Berkshire Archaeology has reviewed the proposal and advised that there is a potential for archaeological remains, including human remains, to be damaged by any necessary ground disturbance. An informative is recommended which advises the applicant how to proceed if any remains are identified during the development.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Works to the main dwelling: Due to the proposed works not encroaching the existing rear building line at ground and first floor level, and the existing separation distances from the side boundaries of the site being retained, the proposed rear extensions would not result in any detrimental impact on neighbouring amenities in respect of overlooking, overshadowing or overbearing impact. The proposed first floor balcony and external staircase serves as a fire escape route and would function primarily as an emergency escape route and, by reason of its limited depth and relationship with the staircase, would provide very limited opportunity for regular sitting out or outdoor recreation. Nevertheless, due to the site being well screened by mature trees on its side boundaries and the orientation of the building the proposed balcony would not create an adverse overlooking opportunity in this instance.

Proposed pool house: Due to the proposed separation distance of approximately 0.7 metres from the proposed pool house and the shared side boundary with the allotments serving the Robert Palmer Cottages, the modest eaves height and the boundary being well screened by mature planting the proposed outbuilding would not introduce adverse harm on the amenity of neighbouring amenity space.

Alterations to the existing garage: The garage is partly attached to the adjacent Suna Court and extends marginally beyond its front building line facing the shared courtyard. Although replacing the flat roof with a pitched roof would add some bulk, the existing modest eaves height of approximately 2.9 metres (which remains substantially below the ridge height of the structure) would be retained, and the works would not extend beyond the current building line. The proposal would therefore not materially alter the existing relationship between the site and Suna Court.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

The design of the proposed development is identical to the extant permission (ref 230238). The proposal would result in the loss of the separate parking area serving Weavers Cottage, with all vehicle parking for the enlarged single dwelling to be concentrated in the existing forecourt shared with adjacent Suna Court. The Council's Highways Officer reviewed the previous application and raised no objection to the

revised parking provision, advising that there would be no significant impact in respect of the Council's parking standards.

The proposed siting of the new vehicular gates is considered acceptable in this instance due to their sliding nature, while pushing them back into the forecourt would restrict the improved turning space. To ensure the opening and closing of the gates do not cause an inconvenience to other highway users a condition requiring them to be automatic is recommended.

Landscape and Trees:

Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan aims to protect green infrastructure networks, retain existing trees and establish appropriate landscaping and Policy TB21 requires consideration of the landscape character. Trees within the site are afforded some level of statutory protection due to falling within a Conservation Area.

The proposal includes a detailed landscaping scheme, with the proposed creation of a new courtyard area to the front of Weavers Cottage to replace the current parking area and the creation of a terrace with additional soft landscaping at the rear. Following the previous application, some trees have been removed or pruned through approved tree works applications and an updated Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement (Tamla Trees, July 2026) has been submitted in support of this application.

The submitted Arboricultural information recommends the removal of 1no. existing tree and tree protection measures during the building works including fenced off areas. The Council's Trees and Landscape Officer has reviewed the proposal and raised no objection, subject to suitable replacement planting including at least 1 to be of a species that will offer future public amenity to retain the verdant nature of the Conservation Area. This can be secured in an updated landscaping scheme which is recommended as a pre-occupation condition.

Ecology:

Policy TB23 of the MDD Local Plan requires that development protects existing wildlife and biodiversity, with particular consideration to protected species. The site falls within a high quality habitat for supporting roosting and commuting bats and the red risk zone for Great Crested Newts.

The Council's Ecology Officers have reviewed the proposal and advised that there is very low risk to GCN, due to the nearest known populations being separated from the site by Pearson Road and neighbouring dwellings. An updated Bat Roost Survey Report (enims, July 2026) has been submitted in support of the application which identified bats emerging from within the loft space of the 1970s side extension. As such the Ecologist recommends that a bat mitigation licence must be acquired from Natural England, including final mitigation measure, prior to the commencement of the development. The Ecology Officer has reviewed the report and raised no objection to this approach subject to proof of the bat licence being submitted to the Council via condition.

Hence, having regard to the survey findings, the proposed mitigation and the Ecology Officer's advice, the Local Planning Authority is satisfied that there is no evident impediment to a Natural England licence being granted and that the development can proceed without adversely affecting the favourable conservation status of the species concerned.

The Ecology Officer has raised concerns regarding discrepancies between the submitted landscaping plans and the submitted ecological report and criticises the landscaping plans for not adequately considering impacts on bat commuting and foraging habitats from loss of trees and shrubs. The agreed condition requiring the submission of a final landscaping scheme will ensure that the replacement planting is appropriate from an ecological, as well as a visual amenity perspective. To further mitigate potential harm on bats the external lighting condition attached to the extant permission, which restricts the installation of any additional external lights without the Council's consent, has been reimposed.

Subject to compliance with the recommended conditions the proposed development would not introduce any adverse impact on protected species or other biodiversity habitats in accordance with the NPPF and MDD Local Plan policy TB23.

Planning Balance and Conclusion:

The proposal has been assessed against the development plan as a whole. It would result in the loss of one existing dwelling contrary to Core Strategy policy CP3. However, this attracts limited negative weight for the reasons set out above. The acceptable design, preservation and enhancement of the listed building and conservation area, and the ability to secure appropriate ecological and Arboricultural mitigation by condition weigh in favour of the proposal.

Subject to the conditions identified in this report, no unacceptable harm has been identified in respect of other material considerations including residential amenity and highway safety. The proposal therefore accords with the development plan when read as a whole, and there are no material considerations indicating that permission should be withheld.

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
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	1 September 2026
Earliest date for decision:	13 August 2026

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	02/09/2026

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

- *Grade II Listed Building*
- *Sonning Conservation Area*
- *Limited Development Location – Sonning*
- *Bat Roost Habitat Suitability Area*
- *Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone Householder (Red Risk Zone)*
- *Landscape Character Assessment Area – Sonning Wooded Chalk Slopes*