

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	261905
Site Address:	The Old Church, Church Road, Farley Hill, Wokingham, RG7 1TR
Expiry Date:	9 October 2026
Site Visit Date:	1 September 2026
Proposal: Householder application for the proposed detached single storey outbuilding containing a double garage and workshop.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Countryside
Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF): • S5 – Principle of development outside settlements • DP1–DP4 – Achieving well-designed places • N2/N3/N6 – Biodiversity, green infrastructure and protected habitats/species, where applicable • HE7–HE10 – Historic environment decision-making policies, where applicable National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Special Protection Area CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC07 – Parking TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB26 – Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Swallowfield Village Design Statement

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
214153	Householder application for the proposed erection of fence railing to front boundary wall. (Retrospective).	Approve 11 th February 2022
182003	Application for the variation of condition 2 of planning consent 151842 for the change of use of place of worship to dwelling house. Condition 2 relates to approved plans; the proposed changes include- pitched roof instead of flat roof over dining room; change in materials from render to sawn oak cladding; increase in footprint of garage; increase in ridge height over garage and reduction in size of front porch	Approve 18 th September 2018
171789	Full application for the change of use of church to two dwellings with associated extensions, access, paving, bin store, surface water drainage and sewage treatment plant.	Approve 24 th April 2018
161094	Proposed change of use from place of worship (D1) to dwelling house (C3) plus demolition of existing vestry and erection of single a storey front extension to form entrance, formation of new vehicle access and driveway, erection of front boundary wall and changes to fenestration including removal of part of wall on north elevation to be replaced by glass sliding doors.	Approve 4 th July 2016
151842	Proposed change of use from place of worship (D1) to dwelling house (C3) plus single storey front extension to form garage/utility, formation of new vehicular access and driveway, creation of mezzanine floor at first floor level and changes to fenestration.	Approve 14 th December 2015

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Landscape and Trees – No Objection Subject to Conditions
WBC Built Heritage Officer – No Objection
WBC Ecology – No comments received

External

N/A

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	No objection raised.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received.

Neighbours	No comments received.
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APPRAISAL

Site Description: The Old Church, Farley Hill is a residential dwelling set back approximately 30m from the highway; and in an Area of Special Character and Countryside. The front boundary treatment is a brick wall and fence with double wooden gates. Mature trees limit views from the public realm.

Proposal: Detached single storey outbuilding to facilitate a double garage and workshop will have a flat roof and oak cladding to external facing walls. It will measure 3.2m in height, 9m in length and 6m in width. On the front elevation it will have 2 no. up and over garage doors, plus a door and window to the workshop. There will be 2 no. windows on the side elevation of the workshop.

Principle of Development: The national decision-making policies within the August 2026 NPPF took effect on 17 August 2026. The relevant national decision-making policies have been considered alongside the development plan, with the weight afforded to existing development plan policies reflecting their consistency with the Framework. The application has been determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The application relates to a detached outbuilding within the residential curtilage of an existing lawful dwellinghouse. The proposal would provide accommodation incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling and would not create a separate planning unit or independent residential accommodation. As an ancillary domestic structure associated with an established residential use, the proposal does not fall within the categories listed in Policy S5(1) and must therefore be assessed against the exceptional-circumstances test in Policy S5(4), as set out below.

Location in Countryside: The site is in Countryside and Core Strategy Policy CP11 states that to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where:

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; and
3. It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement; or
4. In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.
5. In the case of replacement dwellings, the proposal must: i) Bring about environmental improvements; or ii) Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.
6. Essential community facilities cannot be accommodated within development limits or through the re-use/replacement of an existing building.

7. Affordable housing on rural exception sites in line with CP9.

The proposal comprises a new detached outbuilding within the established residential curtilage. It does not fall within the development categories expressly supported by Policy CP11 and therefore conflicts with that policy. It also does not fall within one of the categories listed in NPPF Policy S5(1). Accordingly, Policy S5(4) requires exceptional circumstances and for the benefits of the proposal substantially to outweigh its adverse effects, including effects on countryside character and sustainable patterns of movement.

The proposal would provide secure garaging and domestic workshop space ancillary to the existing dwelling. Limited weight is afforded to that private benefit. Greater weight is afforded to the site-specific circumstances that the building would remain within the established residential curtilage, use the existing driveway, generate no separate use or additional travel demand, and, because of its low profile, materials, substantial road setback and retained screening, have very limited effects on countryside character. It would be closely associated with the established driveway and dwelling, would not create a separate use or additional travel demand, and its low-profile design, recessive materials and screened location would result in very limited countryside or landscape effects. These site-specific circumstances, taken together, are considered exceptional and the identified benefits would substantially outweigh the very limited adverse effects.

To the extent that Policy CP11 precludes this limited form of curtilage development without allowing the balancing exercise required by Policy S5(4), it is materially inconsistent with current national decision-making policy and is therefore afforded very limited weight. The limited conflict with CP11 does not therefore justify withholding permission.

Character of the Area: Core Strategy 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, together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users, including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life. Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy requires developments to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment.

The application site is in the Area of Special Character known as Farley Hill. The street scene in Church Road is a residential street with detached dwellings of varying age and design. The site itself backs on to an extensive woodland area and is adjacent to playing field to the right. The proposed outbuilding would be located to the east of the host dwelling and adjacent to the existing driveway. Whilst the building would be positioned forward of the principal elevation of the dwelling, it would be set back from Church Road by approximately 29m and would not appear prominent when viewed from the public realm.

Hence, the proposal conflicts with the Borough Design Guide guidance that garages should be positioned to the side or rear of a dwelling and should not project forward of its building line. However, the guidance is directed principally at avoiding garage-dominated frontages and harm to street character. In this case, the garage would be

approximately 29m from Church Road, contained within a large plot, closely related to the existing driveway, limited to a single-storey flat-roofed form and substantially filtered from public views by retained boundary vegetation. Furthermore, Figure 1 shows an example of a timber outbuilding located forward of the principal elevation and adjacent to the highway at Oak Cottage which is approximately 50m from the application site. The site-specific visual and heritage evidence therefore demonstrates that the departure from the guidance would not cause material harm to the street scene, rural character or the significance of the identified non-designated heritage assets.



Figure 1 Google Streetview image of Timber outbuilding at Oak Cottage Church Road

The garage would appear as a subordinate domestic outbuilding associated with the existing dwelling and would not result in a visually intrusive form of development. Existing and retained mature trees around the site boundaries would further help to filter views of the structure. The proposal would therefore conflict with the locational guidance for garages in the Borough Design Guide but would not cause material harm to the character or appearance of the area and would accord with Policies CP1 and CP3 in design terms.

Neighbouring Amenity: Core Strategy Policy CP3 states that development proposals should not result in a detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life.

The Borough Design Guide (BDG) recommends that privacy, adequate access to daylight and sunlight and provision of external space need to be considered together in the design process. In this case, there would be a separation distance of at least 40m with the nearest residential dwellings located at White Oaks and The Trystings. Therefore, due to the proximity of the development in relation to neighbouring dwellings there would not be significant harm to neighbour amenity because of overlooking, loss of Light and overbearing appearance to occupants.

Overall, the proposal would comply with Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy in relation to neighbour amenity.

Highway Access and Parking Provision: Policy CC07 of the Adopted Local Plan

states that planning permission will only be granted where the proposal demonstrates that the new scheme retains an appropriate level of off-street parking. The proposal would not increase the number of bedrooms or the parking requirement. The existing driveway would continue to provide space for at least three vehicles independently of the proposed garage, as demonstrated by the proposed Block Plan dated 9th August 2026. The proposal would therefore retain an appropriate level of off-street parking.

Landscape and Trees: The Tree and Landscape Officer raises no objection subject to conditions and has commented: *“The Site is a church conversion residential dwelling with many contemporary adaptations located on a well-wooded parcel in designated Countryside in the Farley Hill area of the parish of Swallowfield, Wokingham. There are **no** protected trees on site, but there are established trees and vegetation of value. SWAL34 – a byway open to all traffic – is located immediately north of the Site but due to the position of the main building, the proposed outbuilding is unlikely to be seen by users on the path. There may be filtered views of the proposed outbuilding from Church Road and the neighbouring properties, however the proposed outbuilding’s architectural style is in keeping with the established architectural language within the Site.*

*The proposed outbuilding requires the removal of one tree, T4 Lawson Cypress (Chamaecyparis lawsoniana), as per Existing Tree Plan (Ref: wysiwyg Design, #PP-15137961, 09/08/2026). It will also impact the root protection areas (RPAs) and **potentially** the lateral branches of three other trees, T2, Sweet Chestnut (Castanea sativa), T3, Maple (Acer), and T5, Lawson Cypress (Chamaecyparis lawsoniana). Canopies of these trees may need facilitation pruning and could create on-going maintenance given their proximity to the outbuilding. The Officer notes the use of timber with ground screws on the workshop side of the proposed outbuilding as seen in Proposed Floor Plan and can see an effort is being made to retain as many trees as possible. (Ref: wysiwyg Design, #PP-15137961, 09/08/2026) As these trees are not protected, are unlikely to be TPO worthy, and because consideration to create an environment where they may still thrive has been taken by the applicant, the Officer accepts the proposal but requires a simple Tree Protection Plan. The Officer will need to ensure that the RPAs of the trees in the front garden are not compromised during the construction period and to this extent all vehicles and storage of materials will need to be restricted to the existing drive with temporary fencing. A plan indicating this will need to be provided either as part of this current application or via a condition”.*

Requested conditions

1. Retention of trees and shrubs: *The trees identified as T2, T3 and T5 on the approved Existing Tree Plan shall be retained and protected throughout construction in accordance with the approved Tree Protection Plan. Any tree so retained which dies or is removed as a direct consequence of the development within five years of first commencement shall be replaced during the next available planting season in accordance with details first submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.*

2. Protection of trees:

a) *No development or other operation shall commence on site until a Tree*

Protection Plan which provides for the retention and protection of trees, shrubs and hedges growing on or adjacent to the site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. No development or other operations shall take place except in complete accordance with the details as so-approved (hereinafter referred to as the Approved Scheme).

- b) No operations shall commence on site in connection with development hereby approved (including any tree felling, tree pruning, demolition works, soil moving, temporary access construction and or widening or any other operation involving use of motorised vehicles or construction machinery) until the tree protection works required by the Approved Scheme are in place on site.*
- c) No excavations for services, storage of materials or machinery, parking of vehicles, deposit or excavation of soil or rubble, lighting of fires or disposal of liquids shall take place within an area designated as being fenced off or otherwise protected in the Approved Scheme.*
- d) The fencing or other works which are part of the Approved Scheme shall not be moved or removed, temporarily or otherwise, until all works including external works have been completed and all equipment, machinery and surplus materials removed from the site, unless the prior approval in writing of the local planning authority has first been sought and obtained.*

Ecology:

Bats: The application site is designated as a suitable bat roosting habitat. The WBC Ecology Officer was consulted and has not commented. The proposal would not involve works to the host building. The tree removal of T4 Lawson Cypress and the works would not sever or materially affect an established commuting or foraging corridor for bats. Given the nature and limited extent of the works, the proposal is not reasonably likely to affect bats or their habitat and further survey work is not proportionate. A precautionary informative will be added to the Decision Notice as follows:

Informative

Bats are a protected species under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Should any bats or evidence of bats be found prior to or during the development, all works must stop immediately, and an ecological consultant contacted for further advice before works can proceed. All contractors working on site should be made aware of the advice and provided with the contact details of a relevant ecological consultant.

Biodiversity Net Gain: The application is a householder application and is exempt from the statutory biodiversity gain condition. Mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements therefore do not apply.

Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area: Although the site falls within the identified Special Protection Area constraint area, the proposal is for an ancillary domestic outbuilding and would not create an additional dwelling, increase residential occupancy or generate additional recreational pressure. It would therefore have no likely significant effect on the SPA, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Great Crested Newts: The site lies within a Great Crested Newt Amber Impact Risk

Zone. The nearest pond would be over 200m away, and the planning statement confirms that the base will be a conventional slab construction and a timber/ground-screw-supported section to minimise excavation and disturbance of the site. Having regard to that evidence, the proposal is not reasonably likely to affect great crested newts or their habitat, and further survey or mitigation is not proportionate. On that basis, the proposal is not reasonably likely to affect great, crested newts or their habitat.

Heritage: The Heritage Officer raises no objection and has commented: *“The proposed a new ancillary outbuilding, to be used for garaging and a workshop, is within the curtilage of ‘The Old Church’ – the former Church of St. John the Evangelist, converted to residential use around 10 years ago. The 19th century building is located within the Farley Hill Area of Special Character (AoSC), a non-designated heritage asset. The building itself, by virtue of its age, architectural and historic interest as well as the positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area, having been noted within the AoSC assessment, is also identified as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA).*

Designed by prominent Victorian architect George Truefitt, St. John the Evangelist was completed in 1892 on land donated by the Brooks family of Farley Hall. The church is of fine red brick with stone dressing under a plain tile roof, the building has an unusual and distinctive bell tower on the southern flank. The church was closed in 2012 and was converted into a residential dwelling in 2016.

The proposed outbuilding is to be detached from the host, and located forward of the building line, off set from the drive to the east of the plot. The building is to be single storey, flat roofed and contemporary in appearance, having a vertical clad timber treatment and a modern EPDM roof covering. Whilst caution is normally taken to a form and appearance such as this in the historic environment, this design route is likely the best taken in this context as to ensure no additional structure overly competes with Truefitt’s fine work. The proposed building would result in the loss of a tree; however, the overall verdant character of the plot would not be significantly harmed. Due to the extant soft and hard boundary treatments, the church no longer has the intervisibility and resultant contribution to the character and appearance of the AoSC it once had, and thus the visual impact of the proposed building is lessened through the greatly reduced experience of the site.

With these factors in mind, it is advised no harm would arise to the significance of the Farley Hill AoSC and to the setting, and thus significance, of the former Church of St. John the Evangelist, both non-designated heritage assets. As such, no objection is raised to the application from a heritage perspective, and the proposals are not considered to conflict with TB26 of the MDD”.

Officer comment: The significance of the former church and the Farley Hill Area of Special Character, as non-designated heritage assets, has been considered. For the reasons identified above, the proposal’s siting, low profile and contemporary but recessive design would not harm their significance or the contribution made by their setting. The proposal therefore accords with Policy TB26 and the relevant national historic-environment policies.

Drainage: The site is in Flood Zone 1. Roof water would be collected by guttering and discharged to the existing soakaway within the site. Having regard to the limited roof area and domestic scale of the proposal, this arrangement is considered proportionate and there is no evidence that the development would increase flood risk elsewhere.

Planning Balance/Conclusion: The proposed development conflicts with Core Strategy Policy CP11 because it does not fall within the categories of development expressly supported by that policy. The proposal would also depart from the guidance contained within the Borough Design Guide, which generally seeks to avoid domestic outbuildings being positioned forward of the principal elevation of the host dwelling.

However, the weight afforded to this conflict is limited in this particular case. The proposed garage/workshop would be located approximately 29m from Church Road, would be closely associated with the existing driveway and dwelling, and would be substantially screened by existing mature vegetation and boundary treatments. As a result, it would not appear as a prominent or visually intrusive feature within the street scene and would preserve the character and appearance of the Farley Hill Area of Special Character.

No material harm would arise in respect of neighbouring amenity, highway safety, parking provision, landscape character, retained trees, ecology, drainage, or the significance of the identified non-designated heritage assets. The development would provide functional ancillary garaging and workshop accommodation associated with the lawful residential use of the site without creating a separate planning unit or increasing residential occupation.

Having regard to the development plan as a whole and all other material considerations, the adverse effects of the proposal are limited and attract only limited weight. The identified benefits, together with the absence of any material planning harm, are considered sufficient to substantially outweigh those limited adverse effects. Exceptional circumstances under Policy S5(4) are therefore demonstrated and, notwithstanding the conflict with Policy CP11 and the limited departure from Borough Design Guide guidance, planning permission should be granted.

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:	8 October 2026
Earliest date for decision:	13 September 2026

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	08/10/26